

# **Virtuosity in Clara Schumann's piano compositions**

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## Virtuosity in Clara Schumann's Piano Compositions

*Jacob Sagrans*

Listen, Robert, would you compose something brilliant, [and] easy to understand...? I would like so much to have something of yours to play at concerts that is suited to a general audience. It's humiliating for a genius, of course, but expedience demands it. Once you provide an audience with something they can understand, you can show them something more difficult—but first you have to win the audience over.<sup>1</sup>

Clara Wieck<sup>2</sup> wrote these oft-quoted words in a letter to Robert Schumann during her second concert tour to Paris in 1839. Although they refer to her perform-

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<sup>1</sup> Weissweiler, Eva, ed., *The Complete Correspondence of Clara and Robert Schumann*, vol. 2, trans. Hildegard Fritsch and Ronald L. Crawford (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 138.

<sup>2</sup> This paper uses the name “Clara Wieck” to refer to her prior to her 1840 marriage to Robert Schumann, and “Clara Schumann” for after the marriage. Because this paper discusses Clara Schumann in conjunction with Robert Schumann and Friedrich Wieck, she is always referred to either by her given and surnames combined, or simply “Clara.” Since “Wieck” and “Schumann” are occasionally used to refer to Friedrich Wieck and Robert Schumann, Clara is never referred to as simply “Wieck” or “Schumann.”

ance repertoire, they also reflect the direction that her compositional output would take, which around this time gradually began to change from crowd-pleasing virtuosic showpieces, or what David Ferris has termed “performer’s music,” to more complex and less openly showy pieces, or “composer’s music.”<sup>3</sup> Even the most cursory glance into her major piano compositions reveals this general aesthetic shift. While works such as the *Romance variée* (op. 3, 1831-3) and *Variations de concert* (op. 8, 1837)<sup>4</sup> firmly exemplify a virtuosic style in line with the fashionable Parisian salon music of such composers as Theodor Döhler, Frédéric Kalkbrenner, and Sigismund Thalberg, a much less virtuosic style predominates post-1840. While Nancy Reich has noted this trend in her biography of Clara Schumann,<sup>5</sup> as have other biographers such as Joan Chissell,<sup>6</sup> there is little discussion

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<sup>3</sup> David Ferris, “Public Performance and Private Understanding: Clara Wieck’s Concerts in Berlin,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56, no. 2 (2003): 354.

<sup>4</sup> All dates and titles for Clara Schumann’s compositions are taken from Nancy B. Reich, “Schumann, Clara,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/> (accessed 7 March 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and The Woman*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001), 211-48.

<sup>6</sup> Chissell focuses primarily on the shift in virtuosity in Clara Schumann’s performance repertoire, although implies that the shift applied to her compositions as well by saying, “she was fully prepared to renounce all youthful dross to play her own part in the magazine’s [*Die neue Zeitschrift für Musik*] avowed aims of awakening interest in the forgotten past and of hastening the dawn of a new poetic age.” See Joan Chissell, *Clara Schumann: A Dedicated Spirit* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), xii.

on how this aesthetic shift may have been affected by the two major shifts in Clara Schumann's life in 1840: her marriage to the decidedly anti-virtuoso<sup>7</sup> music critic and composer Robert Schumann, and her emancipation from her overbearing father and impresario, Friedrich Wieck. Given Robert Schumann's disparaging views on virtuosity, as well as the extremely strained relationship between the Schumanns and Friedrich Wieck resulting from Clara and Robert's courtship, it may be tempting to infer that the change in Clara Schumann's compositions is a direct result of her marriage. But is such a conclusion tenable when examined in the context of the copious writings on virtuosity Robert Schumann and his circle of critics published in *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, as well as the occasional reviews published on the works and performances of Clara Schumann? This essay examines this question, drawing on primary sources such as the *Neue Zeitschrift*, as well as recent writings on musical virtuosity in the nineteenth century, most notably those of Liszt scholar Dana Gooley in his book *The Virtuoso Liszt*.<sup>8</sup> After positing possible rea-

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<sup>7</sup> See especially Schumann's account of the 1834 founding of the *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, which he regularly contributed to and edited from 1835-44, as a reaction to the prominence of virtuosos in the European musical scene of the 1830s in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, eds., *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984), 358. Original German in Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, ed. Heinrich Simon (Leipzig: Reclam, 1888), vol. I, iii-v.

<sup>8</sup> Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

sons for this change in virtuosity in Clara Schumann's compositions this essay discusses the broader implications of a shift away from virtuosity in light of the opposition emerging in the nineteenth century between "popular" and "high" musical styles. This analysis relies heavily on the pioneering work of Peter Burke in *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*.<sup>9</sup> I do not, however, intend to argue that this shift in Clara Schumann's music owes its sole responsibility to Robert Schumann's anti-virtuosic stance, or that she lacked compositional confidence outside the guard of her husband and father. Rather, I argue that one can gain new insights into Clara Schumann's works when one examines Robert Schumann's anti-virtuosic critiques.

This paper focuses on the piano works of Clara Schumann (primarily those for solo piano, but also including her Piano Concerto and Trio) and examines how they may or may not be seen as virtuosic. I limit the discussion to piano works since most of Robert Schumann's critiques of virtuosity revolve around the piano virtuoso salon,<sup>10</sup> and also because Clara Schumann was an accomplished piano virtuosa herself who made her living primarily as a performer, and it is therefore easier to quantify how the conventions of early nineteenth-century virtuosity seeped into her piano compositions than into her other works. In addition, Clara wrote fifteen of her twenty-one published

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: New York UP, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> See Leon Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 191-217 for an overview of these critiques.

opuses for solo piano, so an examination of her writing for piano can be seen as representative of her compositional style at large.<sup>11</sup>

Choosing piano works also makes sense in light of the general virtuoso scene of early Romantic Europe, which centred on the piano virtuosity of the Parisian salon, where performers such as Liszt and Thalberg frequently played. The rise in popularity of *grand opéra* in post-*Querelle des Bouffons* Paris led French audiences to favour singable instrumental styles that invoked an operatic sensibility.<sup>12</sup> This valuing of singability becomes apparent when looking at the well-known 1837 Liszt-Thalberg piano duel, where, although the competition had no clear “winner,” Dana Gooley has shown that there is significant primary source evidence to suggest that “Thalberg’s aesthetic of singing on the piano” resonated far more with Parisian audiences than Liszt’s characteristic mapping of the orchestra onto the piano.<sup>13</sup> One can then conclude that in this setting virtuosity pleased the crowd if it was not overly dense, complex, or convoluted, but appealed to the singability of opera arias while also adding in touches of impressive idiomatic piano techniques. The Liszt-Thalberg duel also exemplifies what

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<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the opuses of Clara Schumann, see Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 211-48.

<sup>12</sup> Gooley, *Virtuoso Liszt*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> In particular, Gooley refers to the Parisian music journal *Le Ménestrel*, which tended to favour Thalberg over Liszt, as evidenced by disparaging articles on Liszt in vol. 3, no. 15 (March 13, 1836), vol. 4 no. 22 (April 30, 1837), and vol. 9, no. 19 (April 17, 1842).

Jim Samson has called the “performance culture” of early nineteenth-century pianistic traditions, where the performance and performer outweighed the text of the performance, the musical score.<sup>14</sup> Both the operatic inspiration of this school of piano virtuosity and the unbalanced relationship between the composer and performer in this “performance culture” played a large role in Robert Schumann’s critiques of virtuosity.

This is not to say that Robert Schumann’s critiques of virtuosity rested solely on the Parisian salon style. In fact, his views on the virtuosity of the salon scene are surprisingly difficult to pinpoint, both because, as Plantinga has noted, his critiques often presumed a familiarity among his readers regarding the more specific conventions he was criticising and therefore did not necessarily spell these conventions out, and because Schumann’s views were rooted in a complex shift in the performer-composer dynamic that was occurring in post-Enlightenment and early Romantic Europe.<sup>15</sup> The complexity of the context from which Robert Schumann’s anti-virtuoso views emerged requires a deeper examination before one can apply his views to an analysis of Clara’s works. Particularly, Schumann’s views on virtuosity can be seen as coming from the new Romantic privileging of the composer, the artistic genius who creates music, above the performer, a mere executor of the composer’s inten-

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Samson, “The Practice of Early-Nineteenth-Century Pianism,” in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, ed. Michael Talbot, 110-27 (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000), 112.

<sup>15</sup> Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 198.

tions.<sup>16</sup> Yet at the same time, as Mary Hunter has noted, late Enlightenment aesthetic thought, particularly in Germany among such artists as poet Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart and composer Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, saw the ideal musical performance as requiring the complete merging of the performer and the composer to serve the ultimate meaning or goals of the music.<sup>17</sup> One could conclude, then, that the composer-performer dynamic required what Hunter calls the “merging of two souls” to serve the aims of the music, and also that given the rise of the post-1800 work concept of music as text, the aims of the music became more and more synonymous with the intentions of the composer.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the composer and performer became one, but that one was increasingly weighted towards the composer.

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<sup>16</sup> See Lydia Goehr, “After 1800: The Beethoven Paradigm,” in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, rev. ed., 205-42 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) for a detailed analysis of the predominant post-1800 “work concept” where performers are expected to remain faithful to the musical text.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Hunter, “‘To Play as if from the Soul of the Composer’: The Idea of the Performer in Early Romantic Aesthetics,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58, no. 2 (2005): 362; Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Vienna: Degen, 1806), facsimile edition, ed. Fritz and Margrit Kaiser (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1990), 295; Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, “Vortrag,” in *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste in einzelnen, alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter auf einander folgenden, Artikeln abgehandelt*, vol. 4, ed. Johann Georg Sulzer (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1792), facsimile edition (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 691-2.

<sup>18</sup> Hunter, “Play from Soul of Composer,” 364; Goehr, “Beethoven Paradigm.”

In such a milieu of aesthetic thought, musical virtuosity simultaneously became an extreme end of the Romantic cult of the individual artistic genius, but also represented a threat to the genius or the intentions of the composer. This conflicted viewpoint is perhaps most concretely exemplified by Johann Georg Krünitz's influential late-eighteenth century *Oekonomische Encyclopädie oder allgemeines System der Staats- Stadt- Haus- u. Landwirthschaft, in alphabetischer Ordnung* (Economic encyclopaedia, or general system of state, city, domestic, and agricultural economy, in alphabetical order) entry on virtuosity (Virtuos), which both praises virtuosi by saying, "one preferably calls the most skilled musicians virtuosi," but then goes on to distinguish "true virtuosity" from an emptier variety that:

Too often... has remained entirely superficial, focused only on the shimmer and splendour on the music's brilliant surface; naturally one loses interest very quickly and what remains is nothing more than charlatanry that dazzles the eyes but leaves the heart empty.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Oekonomische Encyclopädie, oder allgemeines System der Staats- Stadt- Haus- u. Landwirthschaft, in alphabetischer Ordnung*, s.v. "Virtuos" (Berlin: Pauli, 1773-1858), online edition at <http://www.kruenitz1.uni-trier.de/> (accessed 28 November 2009), author's translation from: "Vorzugsweise nennt man die geschicktesten Tonkünstler Virtuosen," and "aber zu oft ist die Bildung ganz auf der Oberfläche geblieben und hat sich mit dem Prunk und Schimmer einer brillanten Außenseite begnügt; dann verflüchtigt sich natürlich sehr bald das Interesse, und es bleibt nicht viel mehr übrig als Charlatenerie, die die Augen blendet, aber das Herz leer läßt."

In this context, where virtuosity became a way of potentially imbalancing the ideal composer-performer dynamic, it makes sense that a composer like Robert Schumann would have had relatively negative views towards virtuosity. Indeed, Schumann's critiques regularly criticised performers for not exemplifying "true virtuosity," which he described as "giv[ing] us something more than mere flexibility and execution."<sup>20</sup> A non-true variety of virtuosity was also often compounded for Schumann by a lack of critical engagement among the audience, who did not attend "to judge, but only to enjoy."<sup>21</sup> In essence, Schumann seemed to view ideal virtuosity as serving a purpose higher than just entertainment. One can also glean from his comments an attempt to distance himself from the tastes of the masses, which did not serve to advance the "true virtuosity" he idealised.

Schumann's views on the conventions of the Parisian salon, however, may be difficult for us to grasp from a modern perspective, for as Leon Plantinga has

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<sup>20</sup> Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 197-218; This particular quote comes from a review of an 1841 Thalberg concert. See Robert Schumann, "S Thalberg: Concert für den Pensionsfond der Musiker am 8ten Februar," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 14, no. 14 (February 15, 1841), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Band 14, 1841.II (Scarsdale, NY: Annemarie Schnase, 1963), 58. English translation in Schumann, *Music and Musicians: Essays and Criticisms*, ed. and trans. Fanny Raymond Ritter, vol. 1 (London: William Reeves, [n.d.]), 170-72.

<sup>21</sup> Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, vol. 1, 171, original German in Schumann, "S Thalberg."

noted, the musical clichés of the salon were so familiar to audiences and readers of the day that Schumann and other critics writing in the *Neue Zeitschrift* rarely saw a need to spell out the specific stylistic elements to which they objected.<sup>22</sup> Plantinga, extrapolating from reviews in the *Neue Zeitschrift*, has created a list of the virtuosic compositional elements of the Parisian piano salon that Schumann and other critics for the *Neue Zeitschrift* found problematic.<sup>23</sup> These include: introductions which change rapidly between fast and slow sections, quickly alternating between the right and left hand to play chords in the same register, composing a melody in a middle voice with sweeping arpeggios surrounding it, scales played in octaves, frequent tremolos, arpeggios, repeated notes, and a heavy reliance on sixth chords.<sup>24</sup> As will be examined in more detail later in this paper through specific musical examples, many of these elements are present in the works Clara Wieck composed prior to her marriage to Schumann.

It is arguable, though, that Clara's incorporation of this Parisian virtuoso style was the result of artistic necessity rather than an aesthetic valuation of this style. As Gooley has argued, one practically had to perform in the Parisian salons if he or she were to have any hope of getting recognised as a professional pianist in the early nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> This could

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<sup>22</sup> Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 198.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-203.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Gooley, *Virtuoso Liszt*, 59.

explain why Friedrich Wieck was clearly eager to introduce Clara into the salon scene at a very young age. Specifically, after the success of Clara's first solo concert at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in November 1830, Wieck decided Clara was ready to set out in September 1831 on an extended tour to Paris. Spending February through April 1832 there, Clara had plenty of opportunity to become exposed to Parisian musical values. In addition to playing in the salon of two wealthy German émigré music connoisseurs, Madame Leo and Madame Valentin, Clara met a laundry list of the influential composers in Paris at the time, including Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn, Kalkbrenner, Pixis, Herz, and Paganini. The works Clara performed while in Paris firmly exemplified the showiness of the virtuoso salon, consisting primarily of transcriptions of opera arias.<sup>26</sup> However, it is likely that Friedrich Wieck programmed these pieces in order to help establish Clara's reputation with works her audiences would appreciate, and not risk hurting her reception by programming overly "serious" music like Bach or Beethoven.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Reich has suggested that both Friedrich and Clara found the Parisian salon tradition to be "frivolous and superficial," and, therefore, only engaged in it out of necessity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Pamela Susskind Pettler, "Clara Schumann's Recitals, 1832-50," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 4, no. 1 (1980): 72.

<sup>27</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 253.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*; See also Friedrich Wieck's letter from February 16, 1832 written from Paris to his wife, where he berates a whole host of attributes of the Parisian salon, including how "everything is evaluated on its outward appearance" (author's translation from:

To some extent, however, when looking at Clara's early compositions, it becomes questionable whether she truly found the French salon scene merely "frivolous and superficial," as there are many similarities between her early compositions and those of such piano virtuosi as Thalberg.<sup>29</sup> In fact, her early piano compositions are replete with musical clichés. A work like her *Variations de concert* (op. 8, 1837) presents a prime case in point. In this composition, Clara presents a theme and variations based on the cavatina "Ah non fia sempre" from Bellini's 1827 opera *Il pirata*. Ironically, Clara wrote this composition at a time when Robert Schumann began launching diatribes against virtuosi writing "mediocre" and "vulgar" variations on Italian opera themes.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the piece, the melody is presented with an increasing amount of virtuosic filler surrounding it. More specific virtuosic techniques include frequent running arpeggios, octaves, frequent diminished seventh chords, and a forte and presto *tour de force* finale (see example 1). Gaspare Spontini, the chief conductor of the Berlin Hofoper praised opus 8 as "the grandest and most beautiful piece of bravura music in recent times," indicating at

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"alles ist hier auf das Äußereste berechnet"), and how Clara was expected to dress all in white and in a different dress at every appearance. See Friedrich Wieck, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1830-1838*, ed. Käthe Walch-Schumann (Cologne: Arno Volk-Verlag, 1968), 43-46.

<sup>29</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed. 253.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 229, original German in Robert Schumann, "Variationen für Pianoforte: Erster Gang," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 5, no. 16 (August 23, 1836), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Band 5, 1841.II (Scarsdale, NY: Annemarie Schnase, 1963), 63.

least a perception that the composition was specifically intended to appeal to a virtuosic sensibility.<sup>31</sup>

**Example 1: *Variations de concert* (op. 8, 1837). Excerpt from finale, starting 16 measures before the end. Note the parallel chords and running arpeggios.**

The image shows a musical score excerpt from the finale of Clara Schumann's *Variations de concert*, op. 8, 1837. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features a piano part with parallel chords and a running arpeggio in the right hand. The tempo is marked 'Presto' and the dynamics are 'ff trionfante'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system has a treble clef and a bass clef. The second system has a treble clef and a bass clef. The tempo marking 'Presto' is located in the second system. The dynamics 'ff trionfante' are located in the first system. The tempo marking 'pesante' is located above the first system. The tempo marking 'S<sup>mo</sup>' is located above the first system.

Another typical early piano work of Clara Wieck's is her *Romance variée* (op. 3, 1831-3), her first composition dedicated to Robert Schumann. This work, like the *Variations de concert*, is firmly in a virtuosic style in line with the Parisian piano salon. Reich has claimed this piece is “replete with musical clichés of the day, and... is precisely the kind of shallow work Robert Schumann was to hold up to ridicule in his *Neue Zeitschrift*.”<sup>32</sup> Presented as a theme followed by a set of highly ornamented variations, the composition appeals to the aesthetics of *grand opéra* and singability, with the added clichés of extended cadenzas full of impressive sounding yet overly repetitive ornamental figures, simple arpeggiation, parallel rolled chords (see

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 51.

<sup>32</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 223; Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 196-217.

example 2, the end of the theme moving into the first cadenza), frequent playing of the melody in octaves, and a *tour de force* presto finale.

**Example 2: *Romance variée* (op. 3, 1831-3).** Excerpt from the end of the theme and beginning of the first cadenza, taken from Clara Schumann, *Romantic Piano Music*, ed. Franzpeter Goebels (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976), vol. 2, 2-3. Copyright 1976 by Bärenreiter, Kassel. Printed by permission.

The image displays a musical score for Clara Schumann's *Romance variée*. It is divided into two systems. The first system is labeled "Pesante" and shows the end of a theme. The second system is labeled "Cadenza" and shows the beginning of the first cadenza. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

A somewhat exceptional work from Clara Wieck's pre-1840 output that merits mention is her Piano Concerto (op. 7, 1833-6), as it is the only orchestral work she published, was extremely impressive as a large-scale work coming from an adolescent, and represents a break from her previous compositions, which had all been smaller piano works. Given Clara's career as a pianist and the character of her previous compositions, one might expect that her concerto would engage the piano in a similarly virtuosic style. Yet the concerto as a whole stands out as a less virtuosic exception among her pre-1840 compositions. Specifically, Clara employed conventions more typical of the refined and serious Romantic concerto that was emerging at the time, as epitomised in works such

as Felix Mendelssohn's first Piano Concerto (op. 25, 1831), where there are no breaks between the movements for audience applause, and cadenzas are either lacking, or more firmly related to the orchestral parts.<sup>33</sup> It is possible that the relative lack of virtuosity in this composition is the result of her choice of genre (specifically, it would be challenging to effectively execute an orchestral composition with the same level of virtuosity as, say, a Liszt étude, due to issues of coordination between the soloist and orchestra), yet such a view is too simplistic in the case of Clara's concerto given that she turned to Robert Schumann for advice when writing in this genre that was new for her. Specifically, she initially wrote the concerto's third movement as an unorchestrated single movement *Concertsatz* that she then asked Schumann to orchestrate for her. After Schumann completed his orchestration, Clara went back and wrote the remaining two movements and orchestrated them herself in a similar style. While Clara's writings discuss only the more mechanical details of who orchestrated what<sup>34</sup> it seems reasonable to suggest that Schumann's opinions on how a concerto should be written seeped into Clara's composition in light of her young age when she wrote it, and the ambitiousness of her endeavour given the makeup of her previous output.

It is important to note, though, that while Schumann helped Clara in writing the third movement of her Piano Concerto, he did not necessarily view the con-

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<sup>33</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 227.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

certo as a high art antidote to the Parisian virtuoso salon. His views on concerti were in fact much more conflicted. For example, in an article entitled “Das Clavier-Concert” (The piano concerto) in the *Neue Zeitschrift*, he simultaneously lamented a lack of piano concerti in the 1830s and also complained that the recent piano concerti the *Zeitschrift* had reviewed exhibited a “severing of the bond with the orchestra,” where “modern pianistic art wants to challenge the symphony, and rule supreme through its own resources.”<sup>35</sup> Schumann longed for a concerto where “the orchestra, more than a mere onlooker, [adds] with its many expressive capabilities... to the artistic whole.”<sup>36</sup> In Schumann’s view, the more conventional piano concerti of the 1830s, by not fully engaging the orchestra, effectively became little different from virtuoso salon music.

Interestingly, Schumann’s critiques of the piano concerto apply to some aspects of Clara’s concerto. This may seem surprising given the role he played in the composition of the third movement, although it would make sense if she wrote parts of her concerto as a virtuosic display for the piano with minimal orchestral intervention given both my thesis and Nancy Reich’s general observations on virtuosity in Clara’s

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<sup>35</sup> Plantinga (trans.), *Schumann as Critic*, 204, original German in Robert Schumann, “Das Clavier-Concert,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 10, no. 2 (January 4, 1839), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Band 10. 1839.I (Scarsdale, NY: Annemarie Schnase, 1963), 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

compositions.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the first movement involves little interplay between the orchestra and piano, and the second movement is written as a romance for solo piano with minimal orchestral intervention (see example 3, which shows a passage from the opening of the second movement). As a result, Schumann's complaint regarding the "severing of the bond" between the orchestra and piano in more conventional concerti could arguably be applied to these movements.<sup>38</sup> However, the third movement, which is by far the longest, does exhibit a high level of interplay between the piano and orchestra (see example 4, which shows the alternation between the piano and orchestra nearly every eight note during the closing bars of the movement).<sup>39</sup> Although Robert Schumann played a

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<sup>37</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 211-48; Reich, "Schumann, Clara," *New Grove*.

<sup>38</sup> Plantinga (trans.), *Schumann as Critic*, 204, original German in Schumann, "Clavier-Concert," 5.

<sup>39</sup> An interesting examination beyond the scope of this paper would be to compare and contrast the piano-orchestra dynamic in Clara Wieck's concerto to Robert Schumann's only complete piano concerto (op. 54), which he finished in 1845, ten years after Clara completed hers, and is not only in the same key (a minor), but employs an intermezzo with a prominent solo cello part, much like the second movement of Clara's concerto, which Reich has suggested could be seen as an influence from Clara in Robert's composition (*Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 228). My sense is, both from listening to and from reading Michael Steinberg's programme notes to Robert Schumann's opus 54 (see Steinberg, *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 413-19) that one could argue Robert's work employs tighter interactions between the orchestra and the piano and uses the piano in a less overtly showy manner, although such

large role in the orchestration of this movement, Reich notes that Clara, while adopting many of Schumann's orchestrational choices, also made many alterations to his orchestration.<sup>40</sup> Thus, it is possible to assert that Clara herself adopted both a similar treatment of the piano to that of the virtuoso salon (in the first and second movements) as well as a high level of orchestra-piano interaction (in the third movement) in her Piano Concerto. In light of this combination, I would suggest that Clara's Piano Concerto represents an in-between state, or a foreshadowing of what would come compositionally when she would become independent from her father as Schumann's wife.<sup>41</sup>

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a claim would have to be backed up by much more detailed score analyses.

<sup>40</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 227.

<sup>41</sup> Further supporting this idea of her concerto as in between a "high" and more popular virtuosic style is the prevalent idea of the piano concerto as a fundamentally in-between genre, as exemplified by Carl Ferdinand Becker's review of Clara's concerto, where he claims that "a concerto should entertain and give pleasure to the layman, satisfy and interest the connoisseur, and finally give the virtuoso sufficient opportunity to present his mastery in the fullest sense of the word" (author's translation from: "ein Concert soll dem Laien Genuß gewähren und ihn unterhalten; den Kenner befriedigen und interessiren und endlich dem Virtuosen hinlänglich Gelegenheit geben, seine Meisterschaft im vollsten Sinne des Wortes darzulegen"). See Carl Ferdinand Becker, "Concerte für das Pianoforte," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 6, no. 14 (February 17, 1837), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Band 6, 1837.I (Scarsdale, NY: Annemarie Schnase, 1963), 56.

Example 3: Piano Concerto (op. 7, 1833-6), passage from the opening to the second movement. Excerpt taken from Clara Schumann, *Konzert für Klavier und Orchester, a-moll* (op. 7), ed. Janina Klassen (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1990), 41.

The image shows a musical score for the Piano Concerto, Op. 7, by Clara Schumann. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 31-33) features a piano part with dynamics *pp con grazia* and *f*. The second system (measures 34-36) includes a *stretto* marking and a *tenuto* marking. The third system (measures 37-41) includes a *calando* marking and a *p legato* marking. The score is for Piano (Klav.) and Violoncello Solo (Vc. Solo). The key signature is A minor (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part includes various articulations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The cello part has a solo line with slurs and accents.

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Example 4: Piano Concerto (op. 7, 1833-6), ending of the final movement. Excerpt taken from Clara Schumann, *Konzert für Klavier und Orchester, a-moll* (op. 7), ed. Janina Klassen (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1990), 121.

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The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The woodwinds (Flute II, Oboe II, Clarinet I and II, Bassoon II) and brass (Horn I and II, Trumpet I and II, Trombone I and II) sections play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth and sixteenth notes. The strings (Violin I and II, Viola, Violoncello, Kontrabaß) provide a steady bass line. The Piano Solo part features intricate sixteenth-note passages. Dynamic markings include fortissimo (ff) and accents (a2). The score ends with a 'Fine' marking.

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If Schumann's involvement in Clara's Piano Concerto represents an early foreshadowing of the direction her compositions would take, a more concrete precursor

can be found in her performance repertoire. Over the course of the 1830s, Clara's concerts progressed from programmes almost entirely built on compositions by virtuoso pianist-composers to programmes with an increasing number of works by Schumann, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Chopin.<sup>42</sup> Although this shift was more or less gradual, it does seem to have reached a focal point in her concert tour to Berlin in 1839. This tour happened against an increasingly hostile background, as Clara, Schumann, and Wieck engaged in a drawn-out legal battle over her impending marriage. On this tour, Clara took a bold move in her programming, playing Schumann's *Piano Sonata in G Minor* (op. 22, 1833-8) in its entirety and in a public setting (as opposed to a salon). Such a performance of a serious piano sonata by a living composer in its entirety was almost unheard of in public concert venues, where performers had to appeal to the *Li-ebhaber* masses rather than to the elite *Kenner*.<sup>43</sup> Ferris has suggested that Clara's decision to play the sonata is reflective of her changing relationships with both Schumann and her father.<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Wieck was attempting to sabotage the tour through a nasty letter writing campaign, presumably, as Schumann himself suggested, out of disgrace for Clara's desire to perform and earn money without her father's help, despite the investments he had made in his daughter's

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<sup>42</sup> See Pettler, "Clara Schumann's Recitals," 70-76 for a more detailed discussion on how Clara's performance repertoire shifted over the course of the 1830s.

<sup>43</sup> Ferris, "Public Performance," 389-90, 398.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 364-5.

musical upbringing.<sup>45</sup> It makes sense, then, that in such a hostile climate, Clara would turn away from performing the works her father had ordered her to perform, and would now likely raise antagonistic sentiments, toward the works of Schumann, in whom she increasingly found her emotional support. In fact, Ferris has noted that during the Berlin tour, Clara's letters suggest she had extreme performance anxiety for her concerts of more typical virtuoso works but little anxiety when she played Schumann.<sup>46</sup>

There is also evidence suggesting that Schumann had a direct influence in the programming of his composition during the Berlin tour. In October of 1839 he wrote to Clara, saying:

It crossed my mind that it would really be good for me if you played something of mine at your concert... [for] it will create an opportunity for people to talk about my compositions, and that would help us *right now* [Schumann's emphasis] since people are talking about us so much anyway; in a word, it will influence public opinion and perhaps the judges in our case, too.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 368, 370; See especially the letter Robert wrote to Clara on April 10, 1840 in Eva Weissweiler, ed., *The Complete Correspondence of Clara and Robert Schumann*, vol. 3, trans. Hildegard Fritsch, Ronald L. Crawford, and Harold P. Fry (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 20-23.

<sup>46</sup> Ferris, "Public Performance," 365, 372. See especially Clara Wieck to Robert Schumann (October 26, 1839) in Weissweiler, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 2, 446-7.

<sup>47</sup> Weissweiler, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 2, 425.

This quote suggests that Schumann not only wished to convince Clara to programme his music in hopes of advancing his reputation, but that he also cast his persuasion as a necessity for their legal battle with Friedrich Wieck and thus for their marriage. Regardless of how legally necessary it actually was to programme Schumann's music,<sup>48</sup> Clara listened to his suggestions, and performed his music almost unquestioningly. Such persuasive letters at a highly vulnerable time in Clara's life must have imparted on her a sense of importance as she entered her partnership with Schumann in moving away from her previously virtuosity-inclined performance repertoire in favour of more "serious" music.

Clara's sensitivity to Schumann's views also evidences itself in letters between the two regarding her compositions. In these letters, one can sense Clara held a general trepidation over showing her works to Schumann. Particularly, in a letter from 1839 she mentions that she has "a strange fear of showing you [Schumann] a composition of mine; I am always ashamed."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps this trepidation was justified given the way Schumann responded to this particular composition (a precursor to her *Trois romances* (op. 11, 1838-9))

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<sup>48</sup> It is possible Schumann's reputation had little effect on the legal battle, for although Saxon courts at the time required parental permission to marry, regardless of age, this law was more a formality, and appealing to the court to override a lack of consent was customary. See Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 69.

<sup>49</sup> Clara Wieck to Robert Schumann (April 23, 1839) in Weissweiler, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 2, 171-3.

with dissatisfaction in a letter a few weeks later.<sup>50</sup> Reich, in an analysis of Clara's writings on her own works, has suggested that she "evidently felt safe in derogating her own work but resented any criticism from others."<sup>51</sup> But in the case of *Trois romances*, the letters between Clara and Schumann discussing the composition following Schumann's initial critique show that Clara, although perhaps initially offended, followed through and revised the piece according to his suggestions.<sup>52</sup> Thus, we have evidence not only of Robert Schumann's increasing influence over Clara as a performer from her 1839 Berlin tour, but also of his increasing influence over her compositions from the letters regarding *Trois romances*.

In the context of both Schumann's increasing influence over Clara and his firmly anti-virtuoso views, it seems all but inevitable that the virtuosity in her piano works would change significantly. Establishing a clear-cut trend is difficult, though, especially since Clara not only wrote less after her marriage due perhaps to her new duties as a wife and mother, but also shifted genres, focusing more on songs than solo piano compositions. The fact that the genres she composed in also changed after her marriage warrants a discussion here as well, for the changes both reflect her shift away from virtuosity and could indicate an

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<sup>50</sup> See Robert Schumann to Clara Wieck (May 19, 1839) in Weissweiler, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 2, 198-203.

<sup>51</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 216.

<sup>52</sup> See Weissweiler, *Complete Correspondence*, vol. 2, 210, 231, 237, 252, 266, 274, 277, 294-5, 299, 307, 312, 323, 333.

increasing influence of Schumann on her compositional aesthetic. While Clara's pre-marriage compositions consisted almost entirely of solo piano music (of twelve published works, ten were for solo piano, see figure 1), her post-marriage compositions consisted primarily of songs (among her published works, there are sixteen songs, seven piano works, and four other types of compositions written in 1840 or later, see figure 1). Furthermore, all of her eighteen pre-1840 solo piano compositions (including lost works and those not published in her lifetime) are in what Jeffrey Kallberg, in his discussions of Chopin's compositions, has called "small forms," meaning forms such as the mazurka, polonaise, prelude, or impromptu which Romantic critics generally deemed inferior and even "feminine" due to their smallness.<sup>53</sup> The critic August Kahlert, for instance, characterised these forms as "the lowest and most popular music genre[s]" which often took "recourse to the most expensive finery in order to corrupt the meaning."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 144-5. For the purposes of this paper, I am defining small forms as the solo piano styles (excluding the sonata) which Clara Schumann and Chopin held in common, including polonaises, études/ studies, preludes (not paired with a fugue), romances, waltzes, rondos, nocturnes, variations, impromptus, mazurkas, and scherzos. I am also including caprices, which Clara Schumann wrote, but not Chopin, as they are in line with the characteristics of small forms that Kallberg lays out (135-58).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. (trans.), 144, original German in August Kahlert, "Die Genrebilder in der modernen Musik," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* vol. 2, no. 47 (June 12, 1835), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für*

Kahlert seemed to dislike these small forms for both their status as “popular” music and, reading somewhat into the words “expensive finery,” for the ways in which they utilise virtuosity.

**Figure 1: Generic breakdown of Clara Schumann’s compositions published in her lifetime, arranged by date of composition. All data about her compositions is drawn from Nancy B. Reich, “Catalogue of Works,” in *Clara Schumann: The Artist and Woman*, rev. ed., 289-337 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). All works are either single opus numbers or multi-movement works (for published works without opus number), except in the case of songs, which are tallied individually.**

Genre	Number of compositions		
	Composed up to and including 1839	Composed 1840 and later	Unknown date of composition
Solo piano music			
Small forms*	18	8	1
Fugues	0	3	0
Sonatas	0	1	0
Songs (solo voice and piano)	6†	23	0
Chamber music	2	2	0

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*Musik*, Band 2, 1835.I (Scarsdale, NY: Annemarie Schnase, 1963), 190.

Concerti	1	1 (incomplete)	0
Cadenzas on existing concerti	0	2	1
Choral songs	1	3	0
Orchestral works	1	0	0

\*See footnote 53 for a discussion of what small forms are and which specific forms are included under this description for the purposes of this paper.

Robert Schumann did not discuss small forms directly, but in a critique of Chopin he claims to “fear that he [Chopin] will not rise any higher than he has so far risen.... He limits his sphere to the narrow one of pianoforte-music, when, with his powers, he might climb to so great an elevation, and from thence exercise an immense influence on the general progress of our art.”<sup>55</sup> Implicit in this critique is the idea that if Chopin were truly to become a “high” artist, he would have to shift away from small forms and from piano music in general. If Chopin did not heed Schumann’s critiques, perhaps Clara did. Although she wrote eight piano compositions in small forms after her marriage, the genres of her compositions branched out substantially and include twenty-three solo songs, three choral songs, two chamber works,

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<sup>55</sup> Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, vol. 1, 201-2, original German in Robert Schumann, “Kürzere Stücke für Pianoforte,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* vol. 15, no. 36 (November 2, 1841), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Band 15, 1841.II (Scarsdale, NY: Annemarie Schnase, 1963), 141.

two cadenzas on existing concerti, and one incomplete concerto (see figure 2). And, as will be analysed in more detail below, the virtuosity in even the small forms became more subdued after the marriage.

**Figure 2: Generic breakdown of Clara Schumann's compositions (including all published, with or without opus number, unpublished and lost works) arranged by date of composition. All data about her compositions is drawn from Nancy B. Reich, "Catalogue of Works," in *Clara Schumann: The Artist and Woman*, rev. ed., 289-337 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). All works are either single opus numbers or multi-movement works (for published works without opus numbers, or unpublished or lost works), except in the case of songs and choral songs, which are tallied individually.**

Genre	Number of compositions		
	Composed up to and including 1839	Composed 1840 and later	Unknown date of composition
Solo piano music			
Small forms*	18	8	1
Fugues	0	3	0
Sonatas	0	1	0
Songs (solo voice and piano)	6†	23	0
Chamber music	2	2	0
Concerti	1	1 (incomplete)	0
Cadenzas on existing concerti	0	2	1
Choral songs	1	3	0
Orchestral works	1	0	0

\*See footnote 53 for a discussion of what small forms are and which specific forms are included under this description for the purposes of this paper.

†These include two songs of uncertain authorship, but that Reich thinks were likely written by Clara. See Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 335.

In looking at specific post-1840 compositions, such as the *Drei Präludien und Fugen* (op. 16, 1845) and her Piano Trio (op. 17, 1846), it becomes striking how far removed they seem from the virtuosity of Clara's younger years. The *Drei Präludien und Fugen*, which Clara wrote as she and Robert immersed themselves in counterpoint studies, are at times almost indistinguishable from Bach (see the strictly contrapuntal writing in the opening to the first fugue in example 5). The strict three-voiced fugal writing makes virtuosic writing in a Parisian salon sense nearly impossible. One, quite justifiably, could see the complex intertwining of contrapuntal lines as virtuosic, although this virtuosity is then created by the fundamental structure of the composition, and is therefore uncharacteristic of the more surface virtuosity Schumann lamented in the Parisian salon, as the virtuosity here serves the advancement of the composition, rather than just pleasing the audience.

**Example 5: *Drei Präludien und Fugen* (op. 16, 1845),  
opening of the first fugue.**

Allegro vivace.

The *Drei Präludien und Fugen* also offer a case in point in Schumann's increasing influence over Clara. In her diary, Clara discusses her fugue studies primarily in terms of Robert's interests, suggesting that she felt a need to study counterpoint given that her husband was "in the midst of a fugue passion."<sup>56</sup> It is also apparent from various letters by Schumann that he worked hard to get Clara's *Drei Präludien und Fugen* published in hopes of advancing her image as a serious composer who could triumph in what he called the "difficult genre" of contrapuntal writing.<sup>57</sup> In other words, it is clear that Schumann not only influenced the composition of Clara's opus 16, but also hoped to use the piece to project Clara as a serious composer, perhaps to break with her image as a virtuoso-composer. And the composition was indeed

<sup>56</sup> Quoted by Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 230.

<sup>57</sup> Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 244, original German in Robert Schumann to C.F. Peters, facsimile in *Erst- und Frühdrucke von Robert Schumann in der Musikbibliothek Leipzig*, ed. Ferdinand Hirsch and Ellen Roser (Leipzig: Bibliographische Veröffentlichungen der Musikbibliothek der Stadt Leipzig, 1960), 47.

successful, earning glowing reviews in both the *Neue Zeitschrift* and the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.<sup>58</sup>

Shortly after publishing *Drei Präludien und Fugen*, Clara began to write one of her most ambitious and widely respected compositions, her Piano Trio. The trio comes across as a higher, more artful composition, due mainly to its layout in strict four-movement sonata form (her only published work with such a layout), its fugato in the final movement, and also for its equality between parts. It is difficult to say how much of a role Schumann had in Clara's designs for the trio; however, shortly after their marriage the Schumanns studied the chamber music of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven together, which could have presented Robert with another vehicle for influencing Clara's compositional tastes. In addition, Clara had also programmed into her repertoire a trio of Beethoven's in 1834, suggesting that she valued more refined chamber music, but did not have the opportunity or encouragement she needed to write a trio until she left her father for Schumann.

Not all of Clara Schumann's post-1840 piano works, however, completely eschew "empty" virtuosity. Most notably, she still wrote sets of variations in the highly

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<sup>58</sup> See "Für Pianoforte: Clara Schumann, Drei Präludien und Fugen," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 24, no. 27 (April 2, 1846), facsimile in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Band 24, 1846.I (Scarsdale, NY: Schnase, 1963), 105 and "Clara Schumann, geb. Wieck: Drei Präludien und Fugen für das Pianoforte," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, no. 5 (February 4, 1846), facsimile in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung: Acht und vierzigster Jahrgang* (Amsterdam: Israel & Knuf, 1966), 75.

singable style we saw in her *Variations de concert*. An example of such a set of variations would be her *Variationen über ein Thema von Robert Schumann* (op. 20, 1853). This composition is quite virtuosic, especially in the fourth variation which presents the melody from the theme (taken from Schumann's *Bunte Blätter*, op. 99, 1838-49) almost unaltered in alto range and surrounded with running chromatic sixteenth note triplets first in the soprano range and later in the bass range, a technique that closely corresponds to Plantinga's list of elements of the virtuosic style of the Parisian salon that Schumann would have found clichéd (see example 6, the opening of the fourth variation).<sup>59</sup> However, the composition does include some more "serious" techniques, like a very imitative sixth variation (see example 7, the opening of the sixth variation). It is also possible that since Clara chose to write this variation on what Schumann would certainly have called a "good boring German theme," that the virtuosity of the fourth variation, regardless of whether or not it is "empty" or "true" virtuosity becomes less problematic, solely for nationalistic reasons.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 202.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. (trans.), 197. Original German in Schumann, "Variationen für Pianoforte," 63.

Example 6: *Variationen über ein Thema von Robert Schumann* (op. 20, 1853), opening to the fourth variation. Excerpt taken from Clara Wieck Schumann, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke* (Munich: G. Henle, 1987), 66. Copyright 1987 by G. Henle Verlag, München. Printed by permission.

Example 7: *Variationen über ein Thema von Robert Schumann* (op. 20, 1853), opening to the sixth variation. Excerpt taken from Clara Wieck Schumann, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke* (Munich: G. Henle, 1987), 69. Copyright 1987 by G. Henle Verlag, München. Printed by permission.

This potential nationalistic interpretation for the continued presence of virtuosity in Clara Schumann's post-1840 piano compositions requires significantly more analysis of Robert Schumann's and the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik's* views on virtuosity, and I will only be able to make a few preliminary points in the space allotted for this essay. A nationalistic interpretation of Schumann's anti-virtuoso stance clearly makes sense in light of many of the views he expressed in

the aphorisms in his “musikalische Haus- und Lebensregeln” (Rules for musical home and lives), which take on a sense of distancing himself from the way the general public valued virtuosity in order to laud his music and those of his contemporaries as “high” art, and often justify this distancing on nationalistic terms. For example, in discussing his views on melody, Schumann wrote:

“Melody” is the amateur’s war-cry, and certainly music without melody is no music. Therefore you must understand what amateurs fancy the word means; anything easily, rhythmically pleasing. But there are melodies of a very different stamp, and every time you open Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, [etc.]..., they will smile out at you in a thousand different ways; you will soon weary, if you know these, of the faded monotony of modern Italian opera melodies.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, when critiquing themes and variations on opera melodies common in the Parisian virtuoso salon scene, Schumann lamented how “one has to swallow the most hackneyed Italian tunes in five or six successive states of watery decomposition.”<sup>62</sup> Given these statements, one might begin to suspect that Schumann’s stance against the virtuosity of the French salon was motivated, in part, by political factors. Such a motivation could also explain the timing

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<sup>61</sup> Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, vol. 1, 416. Original German in Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, 173.

<sup>62</sup> Plantinga (trans.), *Schumann as Critic*, 197. Original German in Schumann, “Variationen für Pianoforte,” 63.

of the shift in Clara Schumann's compositions in the 1840s as tensions built up in *Vormärz* Germany.

The validity of a political motivation for Schumann's anti-virtuosic stance is debatable, since his political leanings are far from clear. He did not participate in the revolutions when they culminated in the Dresden Uprisings in May 1849, where he was living at the time, although in light of the worsening state of his mental condition it is possible he was in no position to participate even if he had wanted to. Yet even if Schumann was pro-republic, a political motivation for his views of virtuosity would still make sense, for if Germany were to become a republic, even one modelled exactly after France, a sense of unified national identity would certainly be a prerequisite, and a unique national music style could contribute to this sense of identity.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Schumann's critiques of "good boring German tunes" as superior to "hackneyed Italian tunes," not to mention his bolstering of the music of earlier and up and coming Germanic composers (especially Schubert and Brahms), project

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<sup>63</sup> In fact, such an attempt at creating a sense of a unified German identity through music becomes evident in the popularity of setting Nikolaus Becker's overtly nationalistic poem "Rheinlied" after the 1840 Rhine Crisis, a poem which Robert Schumann himself set in 1840 as "Der deutsche Rhein" (WoO 1). For more information on *Rheinlieder* as well as the use of Rhine imagery for nationalistic purposes in the songs of Schumann and other composers, please refer to Cecelia Hopkins Porter, "The 'Rheinlieder' Critics: A Case of Musical Nationals," *Musical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1977): 74-98.

a sense of setting Germany apart musically.<sup>64</sup> For this reason, regardless of his stance on the Dresden Uprisings, Schumann's critiques of the virtuosity could be seen as having nationalistic influences.

If a nationalistic rationale behind Robert Schumann's views on virtuosity and the decrease in virtuosity in Clara Schumann's piano compositions seems speculative, perhaps a rationale related to the opposition between popular musical culture and a more "serious" musical culture is more grounded. Robert Schumann's anti-virtuoso views seem a prime model of Peter Burke's theorisation of the fundamental changes in the popular-elite dynamic that occurred around the time of the Enlightenment and French Revolution.<sup>65</sup> Specifically, Burke has put forth a "withdrawal thesis," in which the upper classes, having seen the threat of French Revolution-inspired republicanism and egalitarianism, withdrew from the popular traditions with which they had previously engaged in the hope of projecting a privileged status onto their own culture and traditions and thus upholding their relatively arbitrary and precarious power over the masses.<sup>66</sup> This thesis closely fits Schumann's critiques, as many of his compositions *are* extremely virtuosic (e.g., *Fantasiestücke* (op. 12, 1837), especially No. 2, "Aufschwung"), and thus, distancing his virtuosity

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<sup>64</sup> Plantinga (trans.), *Schumann as Critic*, 197. Original German in Schumann, "Variationen für Pianoforte," 63.

<sup>65</sup> Burke, "Popular Culture and Social Change," in *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 244-86.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-81.

from that of the more popular Parisian piano salon becomes a convenient way of upholding the superiority of his compositions. It should be noted, however, that Burke's theory does not work perfectly in the case of Schumann, as the virtuosity he critiqued combined elements of both popular and high culture. Specifically, virtuosi, especially in the context of the Parisian piano salon, did aim first and foremost to entertain the audience, yet this audience was often an exclusive one of wealthy dilettantes in a private setting. This ambiguity of the cultural positioning of virtuosity suggests that factors outside of the popular-elite dichotomy would have had a greater influence on Schumann's critiques. His writings, as a whole, suggest these other factors would be aesthetic considerations, quite possibly nationalism, and perhaps even resentment over the hand injury that ended his hopes of a career as a pianist.

Janina Klassen has suggested that the conflicted view of the virtuoso as belonging both to popular and high culture also manifested itself in the way Clara Schumann's performances and compositions moved away from virtuosity in the years after her marriage.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, Klassen argues that Clara's marriage to Schumann freed her of the monetary necessity of appealing to mass audiences, and therefore she could

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<sup>67</sup> Janina Klassen, "Virtuosität und Verantwortung. Zur Kunstauffassung Clara Wieck-Schumanns," in *Clara Schumann: Komponistin, Interpretin, Unternehmerin, Ikone*, ed. Peter Ackermann and Herbert Schneider, 139-49 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1999), 145.

move to a “‘more ideal’ artistic production.”<sup>68</sup> Yet Klassen’s view is incomplete, in that it ascribes the shift in Clara Schumann’s compositions to simplistic monetary circumstances without discussing the myriad of ways in which the break with her father and marriage with Schumann influenced her on a more fundamental psychological level. The shift had to involve much more than just simple changes in Clara’s life circumstances, as evidenced by pieces exemplifying what Schumann would have called “true virtuosity” before her marriage (see the discussion of her Piano Concerto above) and works characteristic of a virtuosity more inclined towards mass appeal after her marriage (see the discussion of *Variationen über ein Thema von Robert Schumann* above).

Perhaps in the end, as the shortcomings of Klassen’s views suggest, it is too simplistic to discuss the change in virtuosity in Clara Schumann’s compositional output on the terms of the influence of Friedrich Wieck, Robert Schumann, the dichotomy between popular and elite culture, and nationalism alone. Clara Schumann was a prodigious composer and performer, and likely took a big part in shaping this shift for herself out of the increasing knowledge and skill she was gaining as a composer and performer entering adulthood. But unfortunately, given the documents we have today, it is extremely difficult to talk about Clara Schumann’s thoughts on musical aesthetics or virtuosity solely on her own terms, especially when comparing pre- and post-1840 compositions, given both

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., author’s translation from: “‘idealistischeren’ Kunstproduktion.”

how little she wrote of a critical nature in comparison to Robert Schumann, as well as the well-documented fact that many of her pre-1840 diary entries were actually written by her father and are therefore unreliable.<sup>69</sup> Yet as my musical examples have shown, a change in the virtuosity in Clara Schumann's compositions evidences itself around the time of her marriage, so a discussion of Robert Schumann's aesthetics of virtuosity can help illuminate the backdrop in which the shift in Clara Schumann's compositions occurred. Perhaps as more scholars become interested in the works and life of Clara Schumann, a clearer conception of her aesthetics of virtuosity and rationale behind the shift on terms more independent of Robert Schumann will emerge.

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<sup>69</sup> Reich, *Clara Schumann*, rev. ed., 18. Reich and Gerd Nauhaus are currently working on a critical edition of Clara's diaries written between 1827 and 1840 that will be published in German within the next year and in an English translation within the next year and a half by Olms Verlag. When published, the diaries may make projects analysing Clara's compositions outside of the influence of Robert Schumann and Friedrich Wieck more feasible. Special thanks goes to Dr. Reich for providing me with this information on her and Nauhaus's forthcoming edition.

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**Abstract**

In the late 1830s, Clara Schumann's piano compositions began to shift from crowd-pleasing virtuosic showpieces to more complex and less openly showy works. While Nancy Reich has noted this tendency in her biography of Clara Schumann, there is little discussion on how this aesthetic shift may have been affected by the two major changes in Clara's life in 1840: her marriage to the decidedly anti-virtuoso music critic and composer Robert Schumann, and her emancipation from her overbearing father and impresario, Friedrich Wieck. This paper examines how Robert Schumann's disparaging views on virtuosity and the strained relationship between the Schumanns and Friedrich Wieck may have affected the shift in virtuosity in Clara Schumann's piano compositions, drawing on primary sources such as the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, as well as recent writings on musical virtuosity in the nineteenth century, most notably those of Liszt scholar Dana Gooley. After positing possible reasons for this change in Clara Schumann's compositions, this paper discusses the broader implications of a shift away from virtuosity in light of the opposition emerging in the nineteenth century between "popular" and "high" musical styles. While the shift in virtuosity in Clara Schumann's piano compositions likely had multiple complex causes, this paper argues that one can gain new insights into Clara Schumann's works particularly when one examines Robert Schumann's anti-virtuosic critiques.

