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MEMOIRS FOR MY CHILDREN –
ROBERT SCHUMANN'S JUGENDALBUM

Doctoral Dissertation

Thesis Overview

I. Research objectives

Robert Schumann's *Jugendalbum* is among his best-known works. This is due partly to the warmth and love radiated by the scenes and portraits in the album, and partly to the students and teachers of music who, in the past one and a half century, contributed to their popularity by playing these pieces in concerts and music lessons, which meant familiarizing a wider audience with some of the Romantic master's works composed for children.

Despite this popularity, however, only few have proven to have a profound insight into the genesis of the individual pieces and the collection as a whole, or the family background as a source of inspiration for the composer. Knowledge on Schumann's later works and life – including his illness and death – is similarly hazy, which can lead to a negative assessment of certain parts of his lifetime achievement.

During my research of the topic, I have encountered some harsh contradictions, most of which can be blamed for the spreading of incorrect and often one-sided views and unproven assumptions presented as facts. Luckily, there have been remarkable critiques in English and German in the past few years on the *Jugendalbum* and Schumann's later works which provide considerable guidance. Moreover, we have witnessed the appearance of some sources – sources that had been considered lost – that put the creative concept of the *Jugendalbum* into an entirely new perspective. This is particularly vital as the collection can be seen as a turning point in Schumann's career, especially in terms of family and financial situation, while at the same time it is the key to understanding several works of his late period, and therefore, it may be regarded as a bridge between different creative periods and apparent discrepancies.

What motivated me to study the artist's "memoirs" for his children in my dissertation is my love of Schumann's unique musical world as a performer, my respect for him as an individual

as a teacher, and my interest for the topic as a whole as a father. This paper will deal with the composer's life, his views of art and the world, his convictions about aesthetic and pedagogical issues, his relationship with his wife and children, and a detailed analysis of the Album für the Jugend Op. 68 piano series as the one closest to him. I have made a deliberate attempt at offering a perspective that – besides comparing and contrasting the different opinions – makes the subject more accessible for readers, who, hopefully, will get an insight into the Jugendalbum as well as the composer, his unique place in music history and his fascinating life. I find this all the more important since this field has no comprehensive literature in Hungarian.

II. The process and methods of the research

The Jugendalbum grew directly out of family life, since the first pieces were birthday presents to the eldest daughter, Marie. However, the album, which served both as an exercise book and a scrapbook, soon grew beyond the framework of private sphere. During the course of a few weeks, the result of great inspiration was almost 70 musical pieces, 43 of which were finally published after passing multiple filters. This took little more than three months, although the album and the idea itself date back much further back in time.

For my research to be fruitful, I found it necessary to examine the main stages of the composer's life, mainly the ones that his aesthetical and pedagogical principles are based upon: family relations, his close ties to his pianist wife and eight children, as well as his views on children's education. In addition to Schumann's correspondence, diary, critiques, and memoirs, I relied upon the youngest daughter Eugenie Schumann's memoirs, and monographs such as *Robert Schumann. Herald of a "New Poetic Age"* by John Daviero, *Schumann* by Eric Frederick Jensen, and *Schumann. The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* by Peter Ostwald. The most significant resource for information about his relationship with his children is Schumann's own *Erinnerungsbüchelchen für unsere Kinder*, the Hungarian translation of which I found useful to attach in the Appendix, exactly because of its parallels with the memoir-like nature of the Jugendalbum. I followed the same principle with his last letters to his wife Clara, written in the Eendenich mental institution – they are evidence of his bright intellect and love for his family.

To provide a detailed analysis of the Jugendalbum, I sought to examine all available sources comparatively. At the same time, I was able to depend on several comprehensive works dealing with the literature on the Jugendalbum: most notably Bernhard R. Appel's outstanding *"Actually, Taken Directly from Family Life": Robert Schumann's Album für die Jugend* and *Robert Schumann's Album für die Jugend*, as well as Lora Deahl's *Robert Schumann's Album for the Young and the Coming of Age of Nineteenth-Century Piano Pedagogy* and Anthony Newcomb's *Schumann and the Marketplace: From Butterflies to "Hausmusik"*.

The structure of this dissertation as it investigates the background of the album is not dissimilar to following a child's life from conception and birth, through major milestones in life including mapping out the family ties, to the legacy left to successors, to use a fitting simile by Schumann himself.

III. Conclusions

In the first part of the dissertation I examine points such as Schumann's sources in family, music and literature, and also his search for happiness, the circumstances of starting a family, leading to the fruits in family and artistic life, while attempting to shed light on some of the previously mentioned sensitive issues and paradoxes in order to follow the study from an unbiased and unified point of view. In addition, I try to find an explanation for the "hard times", which were always caused by a tragedy, some extreme physical or even mental burden, such as the quick succession of his wife's pregnancies and the everyday chore of sustaining a family, all of which put enormous pressure on both the composer and his wife.

It will become increasingly apparent how the master of the household became a pater familias to an extended family, while his life and career were also guided by such outside influences as the following:

- the social, cultural, pedagogical, and sociological movements of the Biedermeier;
- the numerous educational textbooks and child-oriented artbooks that were direct catalysts for the creation of the Jugendalbum;
- close contacts with the men of letters and artists in Dresden;

- the outbreak of the Revolution of 1848, which coincided with the birth of the *Jugendalbum*;
- last but not least, the frustration Schumann felt at his children's musical studies and the quality of available musical pieces which were unsuitable for thorough and meaningful learning.

All of these inspired Schumann's creative genius and facilitated the birth of a collection of musical poetry, initially intended for his children and later for publication.

Also in this section is an introduction of a crucial element of Schumann's aesthetics: the acts of remembering and reminding, as seen through the composer's works, statements, and view of life. This will put the different stages of his life into a unified framework as well as demonstrate the unique artistic, spiritual, and emotional universe that the Romantic mind inhabited.

The objective set out for the second part is to draw up a detailed picture of the creative process, which started some days before Marie's birthday, which directly inspired it, and finished after the release of the album. This period was characterized by frantic arrangements, correspondence with publishers and associates, and negotiations, experiences sweetened by the magical moments with his family and the piano.

This is followed by a look at those criteria that help in the organization and analysis of the individual pieces, evaluating the artistic concepts, structural principles, musical-historical implications, and the musical-aesthetical categories they reflect. Having gained a more profound understanding of the pieces – the main goal being detecting their links to Schumann's family life and detailing the methodological and didactical points to be utilized in musical education –, I explored the album's impact on the composer's family and immediate environment. At this point I touch upon the pieces left out of the published material, or unfinished works, as well as his parables, which bear the collective title *Musikalische Haus- und Lebensregeln*.

The final chapter of this paper is a study of the impact of the *Jugendalbum* up to our times, examining the long-awaited benefits it has resulted in, as well. The remarkable changes to the financial situation of the Schumann family and his creative work brought about one of the

longest periods of harmony and prosperity in his life. Also in this section, I give an overview of some of Schumann's "*Hausmusik*"- and training pieces that followed in the footsteps of the *Jugendalbum*. Finally, I mention the great composers and music teachers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, both foreign and Hungarian, who, having recognized the values and underlying principles in the *Jugendalbum*, became the followers of Schumann's legacy.

As a conclusion, it is established that in addition to being a man of extraordinary imagination and genius in terms of both writing and composing who was dedicated to art and culture, Schumann, the head of a big family, was also devoted to his loved ones, as seen in his family-and-child-centric philosophy of life. The fact that his life ended in tragedy must not cast a shadow over the principles he pursued consistently throughout his life, the purity of his intentions and feelings, his morality, and ultimately, the self-sacrifice he demonstrated in his attitude towards what mattered most to him: his art and his family.

The above mentioned will be proven with the written documents studied in the course of my research. The results of my research are as follows:

- in addition to the detailed analysis of the musical pieces and their influence, I have explored Schumann's pedagogical and aesthetic principles as well as the didactical-methodological possibilities in musical education;
- by focusing on the unique features of his personality and his relationship to his children and wife, I offer an individual approach to his art;
- I have included charts of resource documents and chronological charts in the body and the appendix of the dissertation, which I developed to show the history of the *Jugendalbum* and the Schumann family from a new perspective;
- I have given a Hungarian translation of some of Schumann's writings and letters related to the subject which are only available in foreign languages, thus broadening the scope of resources in Hungarian;
- since thus far in Hungary there has not been comprehensive work based on the vast foreign language literature on this subject, especially not with a focus on the *Jugendalbum* and the composer's family relations, both my research and the present thesis is intended to fill that gap.