

Review Essay

Robert Schumann Recordings on Period Pianos in the Bicentennial Year

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ARNOLD DOLMETSCH, ONE OF THE pioneers of the early music movement, was mainly interested in the performance of music up until and including Bach's time, while performance of later repertoire from then until today was entrusted to the so-called "unbroken tradition." But during the past three decades, performance practice studies has broadened its focus to include the music of the nineteenth century. Writing in *19th-Century Music* in 1977, Robert Winter called for "a few dozen Arnold Dolmetsches applying their imagination and zeal to nineteenth-century problems."¹ By 1984, Winter could report that the number of period instrument recordings of nineteenth-century repertoire had risen from 30 to 125 (including six with various piano works of Robert Schumann).² It is worth revisiting his report in order to gain a clear picture of the evolution of the early music movement and its achievements. Winter mentions the fact that a great number of recordings made then were for either solo piano or other instruments accompanied by the piano; operas and orchestral music on period instruments were under-represented. This situation is significantly different today. At present one can find multiple performances on period instruments of almost any given major nineteenth-century orchestral work. Today, even a prominent orchestra such as the Berlin Philharmonic, whose reputation is hardly built on its expertise in nineteenth-century performance practice, will likely, while playing Schubert under Nikolaus Harnoncourt or Beethoven under Simon Rattle, drop its constant heavy vibrato, adapting to shorter phrases.

Since Winter's article of 1984, there have been many developments in nineteenth-century keyboard performance practice, made possible in part by advances in the replication of nineteenth-century instruments; in both

¹ Robert Winter, "Performing Nineteenth-Century Music on Nineteenth-Century Instruments," *19th-Century Music* I/2 (November 1977): 173.

² Winter, "The Emperor's New Clothes: Nineteenth-Century Instruments Revisited," *19th-Century Music* VII/3 (April 1984): 251.

the United States and Europe, builders of period pianos have seen a dramatic increase in demand. Many of the major universities and conservatories in the United States now own a five-octave piano, and some own both an eighteenth- and a nineteenth-century instrument. Yet neither have concerts given on nineteenth-century pianos become an indispensable element of classical music life, nor has the number of recordings on nineteenth-century instruments per year come close to those on modern pianos. This may indicate that, while period-instrument orchestral recordings may be achieving wider acceptance, the modern piano is still seen as the culmination of an evolutionary development that has now reached the optimal version of the instrument; thus, the thinking goes, it is not important to revisit the older, simply less-developed versions. But why should this hold true for pianists and not for players of string or wind instruments and their orchestras? Can it be that pianists are missing something that is evident to everyone else?

The reception of early pianos today bears strong similarities to the revival of 'forgotten' instruments during the first decades of the early music movement: those instruments that did not have obvious modern counterparts, such as the double-reed shawm, the crumhorn, and the serpent all looked and sounded exotic to audiences, and thus were unthreatening to modern traditions. Five- and six-octave pianos from the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century also came by their perceived legitimacy more easily than keyboards from the mid nineteenth century onwards, which resemble the modern piano in size and range. The similarity of the modern piano to nineteenth-century pianos risks making the performer who chooses to play on the latter simply seem to be in the throes of a fetish for antiques.

But what does such a late "period instrument" contribute to our understanding of the music composed for it? It is important to approach such questions with a spirit of exploration and experimentation, especially when one has the luxury of performing on such an instrument, be it a well-made replica or a well-restored original. We know from many written accounts that each and every performer of the nineteenth century, among them Liszt, Chopin, and Clara Schumann, had their own preferred instruments, and opinions were as varied as the number of pianos available. As Winter claims, and as we will see in this review, the development of the piano during the nineteenth century can indeed be best understood as a series of tradeoffs rather than a consistent and continuous line of development.³

³ Winter, "Orthodoxies, Paradoxes and Contradictions: Performance practices in nineteenth

New Schumann Releases in 2010

In the first six months of this Schumann bicentennial year, there were a vast number of performances of his works in concert and festival programs worldwide, as well as conferences dedicated to recent scholarship on Schumann. Of these, the most important were the four-day-long conferences held at the Schumann-Haus in Zwickau in January, and in Leipzig in April 2010. In December, there was also a conference entirely dedicated to the interpretation of Schumann's music held in Basel, Switzerland at the Hochschule für Musik; this included a master-class given by Andreas Staier and a concert featuring Quartet Mosaiques on period instruments. Two new CDs have been released this year by Tobias Koch on various nineteenth-century instruments, focusing on Schumann's late piano works (1845-1849), and including didactic works such as the *Album für die Jugend*, op. 68, among others. Another release in 2010 is Christoph Hammer and Gudrun Schaumann's "The circle of Robert Schumann" (Capriccio: B003COG19K), which includes three Schumann violin sonatas, as well as works of Joseph Joachim, Woldemar Bargiel, and Clara Schumann. This year has also seen the release of several CD box sets of Schumann's works, mostly consisting of older recordings. Deutsche Grammophon offers a bicentennial Schumann box, with performances dating from the mid 1960s until 2000.⁴ Two other compilation box sets dedicated solely to Schumann's piano works were released early this year. "Schumann: Complete Piano Works" (Brilliant Classics: 94008) includes performances by Klára Würtz, Ronald Brautigam, Luba Edlina, Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy, Mariana Izman and Peter Frank; "Schumann: Complete Music for Piano Solo" (Menuetto Classics) is a digital reissue of Peter Frankl's complete piano works of Schumann recordings from the 1970's, available only online for downloading in MP3 format.

But the goal of this review is to focus on Schumann recordings on period instruments, and indeed, recent years have seen some significant releases of recordings on nineteenth-century pianos. Needless to say, a good period instrument alone cannot ensure an inspiring, competent, and musical interpretation. To repeat the obvious: performers will need to inform themselves through the relevant sources, explore the possibilities of period instruments,

century piano music," in *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music*, ed. Larry Todd (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 38.

⁴ We may note that most of the orchestral works are represented by the period-instrument Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique under the direction of John Eliot Gardiner, yet not a single piano work in this set was recorded on a period instrument.

and develop new and critical perspectives on even the most famous warhorses. If performers are to garner new audiences for their music, this is a burning necessity, not merely a domain reserved for a few 'elitists.'

For this review, I am going to focus on the two CDs released this year by Tobias Koch, "Klaviermusik für die Jugend" (Genuin Classics: 10170) and "Klavierwerke aus Dresden 1849-1849" (Genuin Classics: 10159), as well as on two releases from 2007 and 2008 respectively: "Späte Klavierwerke" (Genuin Classics: 86062), also by Koch (2007), which presents late piano works, including the *Fantasiestücke* op. 111 and *Gesänge der Frühe*, op. 133, and Andreas Staier's 2008 project, "Tribute to Bach" (Harmonia Mundi: HMC901989). Both these pianists, who use different pianos in every new recording they release, and all four of these recordings, offer good examples of a critical and experimental approach to Schumann performance.

"Späte Klavierwerke"

On pianos

"Pay attention early on to the tone and character of the various instruments; attempt to commit them to your ear's memory."

Robert Schumann

This quotation, from Schumann's *Haus- and Lebensregeln* of 1850, seems to inspire Tobias Koch's choice of pianos in this recording, as he makes use of two entirely different instruments, bringing the unique quality of each to the fore. His CD, titled "Späte Klavierwerke", includes *the Fantasiestücke* op. 111, the *Sieben Clavierstücke im Fughettenform* op. 126, the *Gesänge der Frühe* op. 133, the *Thema mit Variationen* WoO24, four selected pieces from *the Klavieralbum für die Jugend* op. 68, two *Choralsätze*, sketches that Schumann produced while at Endenich, and the *Balladen für Declamation und Pianoforte*, op. 106 and op. 122 numbers 1 and 2. According to the first edition, these last pieces could be performed with or without the spoken part. Op. 68 and the two *Choralsätze* are performed on a square Klems piano from circa 1850, which is currently on display at Schumann's last home in Düsseldorf; the rest of the tracks are performed on a grand piano by Klems from circa 1855.

In an accompanying essay, Koch provides a detailed history of the instruments used in the recordings. He explains that Klems pianos were Clara Schumann's first choice of instrument, and that one of these instruments was always made available to her no matter how distant the concert venue, or how costly the transportation.⁵ In this she was not alone: Felix Mendelssohn, Ferdinand Hiller, Theodor Kirchner, Johannes Brahms, and Max Bruch were among those musicians who were fond of Klems instruments. The rich, dark sound in the bass and the bright, light treble characteristics of these pianos were broadly appreciated. The merit of this instrument versus those made by Erard, according to a review from 1863, was that it combined the Erard action with a greater ease in execution.⁶ Four weeks before the composition of *Gesänge der Frühe*, the Schumanns acquired a Klems piano, which may have inspired Robert with its voluminous and spacious sound. Klems combined facets of French and English pianos, and the under-damping was a feature he adapted from Erard. The damping system constituted perhaps the greatest difference between this instrument and the Schumanns' earlier piano, built by Conrad Graf. Klems's system ensured a constant aura of sound and the rich reverberation of harmonics. His instruments were also among the first cross-string pianos in Germany, with a fine iron construction.

Koch points out that Klems pianos were only one of a great variety of pianos in use in the nineteenth century. Thus, he underlines, the sound we hear is not *the* sound but rather *a* sound of that era. The above-mentioned 1863 review talks about the tone quality of the piano in question, and does so in such detail that it becomes clear just how much attention was given to differences between pianos, something that can hardly be said about most concert or recording reviews in today's world, dominated almost exclusively by one brand of piano.⁷

In choosing the Klems square piano, Koch seems to underscore the Hausmusik aspect of this repertoire, yet this particular piano does not allow his performance to have the variety of sound that each piece may actually need. Although Brahms praised the "singing tone" of the square pianos of Klems, this particular instrument seems to have lost that quality, and sounds rather tinny. Another interesting aspect of this recording is the tuning system: Koch uses Kirnberger III, developed by Johann Kirnberger in 1779. While Koch admits that we do not know what temperament Schumann preferred, he does not

⁵ See liner notes to Tobias Koch, "Späte Klavierwerke" (Genuin Classics: 86062), 7.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

explain why he chose such an early one himself (although he acknowledges that this temperament might irritate the listener with its surprising intervals). Each of Kirnberger's three temperaments dealt with the extra comma that results from a complete circle of perfect fifths in different ways. Kirnberger III deals with this problem by compromising the perfection of four fifths, and it has only one pure third; in this way the extra comma is spread through the intervals more equally, but the number of compromised intervals is higher. It is unlikely that Schumann would have used equal temperament, yet it seems equally hard to imagine that he would have favored a tuning from 1779. In other words, listeners to this recording will have to adjust their ears to an unorthodox tuning which is rarely used for Schumann's music.

Koch's interpretation of the first of the op. 111 *Fantasiestücke* does justice to its title: *Sehr rasch, mit leidenschaftlichem Vortag* (very fast, with a passionate execution). His playing is full of restless passion, and he displays this agitation with the ebb and flow of a rubato playing style; this is an excellent opening track for the CD, as it gives the listener a clear notion of the capabilities of this wonderful Klems grand piano. The third piece too is very well rendered, its opening section bubbling with energy. Particularly enjoyable are the moments where the top voice reaches out to a higher register, which Koch emphasizes by delicately lingering. In the second of the *Fantasiestücke*, Koch might perhaps have used a more wistful tone in the A section, to create a more pointed contrast with the B section. But the calmer pieces of the op. 126 *Sieben Klavierstücke in Fughettenform* are wonderfully rendered. Koch reacts flexibly to the rhythmic contours of the melodic line, giving each theme a distinctive color. He creates a relaxed flow in all three pieces of the cycle with a subtle employment of rubato, which seems to be informed by a sensitive reading of phrasing and accent markings. However, Koch's reading of certain accent markings deserves to be mentioned briefly. In the second piece, *Mäßig*, he interprets the *fp* sign marking each new entrance as an indication for a sudden increase in volume. Thus the continuous flow of the piece receives a slight bump each time this sign appears. An alternative way of interpreting this sign could be to read it as an agogic gesture, by lingering on these notes slightly longer. Schumann employs an *sf* sign in the nineteenth measure of the same piece in order to support the entrance of the theme while prolonging the first note of the theme in a second voice. The degree of emphasis Koch uses for the *fp* signs may be appropriate for the *sf* sign in this measure, as these two signs clearly mean two different things to the composer, especially when *sf* and *fp* are used consecutively. Thus *sf* may be understood to indicate a sudden increase of volume with a faster attack,

whereas *fp* could be read as a lesser degree of increase in volume coupled with an agogic emphasis.

The fourth of the *Sieben Klavierstücke*, which bears the indication *Lebhaft* (lively), is played percussively and in something closer to an *agitato* character than an energetic one. Schumann marks his main theme with staccato signs and the accent marking \wedge (widely referred to as a *marcato* sign). While it is possible to understand these markings as signaling a lightness of touch, Koch reads them as indicators of sharpness and edge, shortening the time value of the notes to which they are attached.⁸ When his articulation and tempo choices come together with an uncompromising *forte*, the resulting sound is a little raucous for my taste. Nonetheless, these are relatively minor quibbles. The sixth piece, *Sehr schnell* (very fast), displays a better application of a similar approach. This piece too is heavily marked by *marcato* and *sf* signs and has a continuous flow, but here Koch negotiates a better balance between snappy articulation and voluminous but not harsh sound. Koch renders the counterpoint here democratically, not accentuating each new entry to the degree that one is used to hearing in modern performances.⁹ Through his skilled command of his chosen instruments and by virtue of his musical and intellectual understanding of these neglected pieces, he offers a very engaging listening experience.

The first of the *Gesänge der Frühe* (op. 133) carries something of the sobriety and calm of the early morning hours, which Koch's playing projects beautifully. His reaction to the abrupt changes of texture in the second piece is finely nuanced, and the juxtapositions of the solemn and playful elements are reflected through adaptations of the tempo. The third piece is one of many in which Schumann selects one rhythmical pattern and pursues it throughout the piece relentlessly, encouraging the performer to treat the rhythmical element in a flexible way. Koch's playing here is free of stiffness, and alternates effortlessly between different characters.

⁸ The same issue could be raised about Koch's interpretation of staccato signs in his rendering of opp. 72 and 76, on the CD "Klavierwerke aus Dresden 1849-1849" (Genuin Classics: 10159), reviewed below.

⁹ This point is not meant as a criticism of modern pianists, but rather it raises a technical issue to do with the instruments themselves. As a result of the longer-lasting sound produced by modern pianos, the performer needs to observe a more nuanced hierarchy between the more and less important voices and their entrances than would be necessary on a nineteenth-century instrument where the sound decays much faster.

“Klavierwerke aus Dresden 1845-1849”

For this recording Koch chooses an Erard from 1850, the type of instrument that Clara Schumann often used for her concerts in England. The works included here are Clara Schumann's *3 Präludien und Fugen*, op. 16, and Robert Schumann's *4 Marches* op. 76, *Waldscenen* op. 82, *4 Fugen* op. 72, *Studien für den Pedal-Flügel* (excerpts) op. 56, and *Skizzen und Fragmente* (from the *Dresdner Taschennotizbuch*).

1845 brought many changes to Schumann's life: he had various health problems from which he recovered only slowly. He ended his contribution to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, and moved from Leipzig to Dresden. This year was also marked by his deep immersion in contrapuntal studies. It is often suggested, as Koch does in his liner notes, that Schumann returned to Bach at difficult times, in order to reorganize his mind and deal with his musical and personal crises.¹⁰ But the return to Bach's works in 1845 might also be attributed to his search for a new manner of composing. At this time, he sought to develop new skills of invention, and to eschew a former reliance on composing at the piano: “Only from 1845, when I began to invent and work out everything in my head, did a completely different way of composing begin to develop.”¹¹

Though Koch does not identify his tuning in the liner notes to this recording, it is clear that he has again chosen an unequal temperament: given the lack of explanation in the accompanying prose, an unwary listener might simply assume that the piano is out of tune. In the *Waldscenen* op. 82, especially in pieces such as *Einsame Blumen* and *Vogel als Prophet*, the sourness of the intervals is so distinct that one wonders if the pianist really wanted to direct so much of our attention to this tuning rather than to other elements of his performance. In fact, his playing of these pieces is anything but boring. The spookiness of his *Verrufene Stelle*, the pensive quality of *Abschied*, and the playfulness of his *Jäger auf der Lauer* make this recording a very refined one. In the final track, which is a series of sketches and fragments, we can hear an alternate ending to *Vogel als Prophet*. It is very interesting to discover that Schumann had originally imagined something quite different from the perfectly symmetrical form that we know. By including this insight Koch gives the listener a glimpse into the

¹⁰ This argument is also made to account for Schumann's transcription of Bach's cello suite in the asylum in Endenich.

¹¹ Quoted in the liner notes to Tobias Koch, “Klavierwerke aus Dresden 1849-1849” (Genuin Classics: 10159), 4.

working process of the composer, and brings the often separate worlds of scholars and piano music enthusiasts closer to one another.

“Klaviermusik für die Jugend”

“Without hesitating for a moment: this is Schumann’s most underestimated work for piano!” This is how Tobias Koch describes the *Album für die Jugend* op. 68 in the liner notes to his two-CD set of “Klaviermusik für die Jugend” (Genuin Classics: 10170). Koch’s excellent recording makes a very strong case for this statement. The surprising disregard for *Album für die Jugend* makes Koch’s work a timely contribution, bringing its forgotten charm to our attention. He changes the scenery entirely with every small piece, artfully employing the rich tone colors of the instrument by Johann Baptist Streicher (1847) that he uses. This recording also includes *Drei Klaviersonaten für die Jugend* op. 118 and the Supplement to op. 68, which displays alternate versions of some of the forty-three selected pieces, as well as those pieces that did not make it into the album.

The CD opens with an unexpected and pleasing surprise: on the first track, a reader performs a selection of entries from Schumann’s *Musikalische Haus- und Lebensregeln*,¹² which was published together with his *Sonaten für die Jugend*, op. 118, in a later edition of *Album für die Jugend*.¹³ The *Sizilianisch* and *Landliches Lied* are played with just the right amount of tempo flexibility. *Mignon*, on the other hand, shows what a warm effect can be created by the holding down of the sustain pedal on this straight-strung piano: it never disturbs, but rather invites the listener to enjoy the wash of color created by the lifted pedal. *Winterzeit* I and II, two exquisite pieces, stand as evidence that Schumann’s creative power was fully intact as late as 1848. In a letter to Carl Reinecke, Schumann had the following to say about his op. 68: “They are definitely different from the Scenes of Childhood, which are reminiscences of an older person for older people, whereas the Christmas Album [later called *Album für die Jugend*] contains more reflections, suggestions, future states of mind, for those who are younger.”¹⁴ On this recording, we can clearly hear how

¹² “Advice to young musicians” is a series of didactic aphorisms, giving practical advice about how to improve one’s musicianship.

¹³ The accent of the narrator, Bernhard Biller, is Saxon, which is a nice little detail that reflects the Schumanns’ place of origin.

¹⁴ Quoted in the liner notes to Tobias Koch, “Klaviermusik für die Jugend” (Genuin Classics: 10170), 20.

this work is different from the *Kinderszenen* op. 15, yet in no way inferior in its craftsmanship or inspiration.

Koch also performs the *Geburtstagsalbum für Marie* (a birthday album created by Schumann for his daughter Marie's seventh birthday, and the point of departure for op. 68), the *Kleiner Lehrgang durch die Musikgeschichte* and the *Andante and Variations* for two pianos op. 46. This last piece, in which Sara Koch accompanies Tobias Koch on the second piano, showcases the entirely different qualities of the Streicher instrument in comparison with an 1844 Pleyel, without either of the instruments being cast into shadow by the other. The success of this beautiful recording demonstrates that it is possible for the various types of pianos to co-exist, a fact which can only enrich our listening experience and encourage us to demand more from instruments both as players and listeners.

Andreas Staier: "Robert Schumann, A tribute to Bach on Piano"

Like Tobias Koch, Staier suggests in his liner notes that Schumann's engagement with Bach's music around 1845 inspired him to "set himself contrapuntal studies and analyses in the hope of regaining inspiration and mental stability."¹⁵ However, as we have noted, it is possible that Schumann had a more complex relationship with Bach's works than simply treating them as a substitute medical remedy. Laura Turnbridge has proposed an alternative reading:

Schumann declared that he changed his compositional method in the mid-1840s; he began to sketch and plan, rather than letting music pour out from poetic inspiration. This new manner has been characterized as a more 'objective' and classical approach, in contrast to the 'subjective' and romantic attitude of before.¹⁶

Schumann also repeatedly revisited another source of previous inspiration: the writer Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825). Even though his main occupation with Jean Paul's works occurred during his adolescent years, Schumann returned to them after 1839, reading all five major novels of Jean Paul's once more in 1853.¹⁷ The composer declared that he had "learned more counterpoint from

¹⁵ Liner notes to Andreas Staier, "Robert Schumann, A tribute to Bach on Piano" (Harmonia Mundi: HMC901989), 14.

¹⁶ Laura Turnbridge, *Schumann's Late Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁷ Erika Reiman, *Schumann's Piano Cycles and the Novels of Jean Paul* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 11.

[Jean Paul] than from his music teacher.”¹⁸ It is not hard to see the connection between his revisiting of these master’s works while revolutionizing his own compositional style.

Andreas Staier has always been meticulous in his choice of instruments for his recordings. Both the Johann Fritz piano that he used for his inspiring 1994 recording of Schumann’s *Lieder* with Christoph Pregardien (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, DHM 05472 77319 2) and the Johann Baptist Streicher instrument used in his 1996 recording of Schumann’s A-minor concerto (Harmonia Mundi, HMC 901555) with Phillip Herreweghe were remarkably beautiful. Staier’s instrument here is a Paris-made Erard from 1837, which captures the ear of its listener immediately with its velvety and voluminous tone. He explains that his choice was influenced by the fact that, in 1853, Schumann gave his wife a Klems instrument that was similar to Erard’s in its construction. The fact that Clara Schumann often played on Erards when she was on concert tours (when Klems’s instruments were not available) presumably also factored into Staier’s final decision to use this instrument.

As the title indicates, the selections on this recording all bear some relation to J. S. Bach. The first eight tracks of this CD are pieces from the *Album für die Jugend* op. 68, five of which have titles such as *Ein Choral* or *Kanonisches Lied* that clearly suggest a contrapuntal style. Staier’s rendering of *Reiterstück* and *Erinnerung* displays both his and his instrument’s capabilities clearly. In the first of these, he makes full use of the dynamic range of the piano, which reaches from a very delicate *pp* to a full yet not harsh *ff*. In the second, Staier makes us appreciate the hazy sound of the Erard (partly due to its under-damping), which fits the character of the piece very well; the same quality of this piano can also be enjoyed in the first, fifth, and seventh pieces of op. 126.

In the *Kinderszenen*, op. 15, Staier chooses to use Schumann’s own metronome markings, which are much more brisk than the tempi taken by most pianists who have recorded these pieces in the twentieth century. One thing that some performers on older recordings do offer, though, is their inspired and flexible way of playing, as in the famous Alfred Cortot recording of 1953 (Naxos Historical, 8.111327) or the Vladimir Horowitz recording of op. 15 from 1962 (Sony, 93039). Many listeners of the present day became familiar with this work through these older recordings, and today’s young artists must offer alternative versions that are equally interesting. As much as the faster

¹⁸ “Von diesem habe ich mehr Kontrapunkt gelernt als von meinem Musiklehrer.” Robert Schumann, *Briefe: Neue Folge*, 2nd ed., ed F. G. Jansen (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1904), 149.

tempi used by Staier and indicated by Schumann encourage the pianist to avoid interpretations that are overly sentimental, if used inflexibly they sound somewhat breathless at times. Staier is well acquainted with the performance practices of the nineteenth century, such as asynchronization of the hands and breaking of the chords, which he uses sparingly, but one wishes that he had also lingered longer on those special moments. Breaking of the chords or playing one hand slightly after the other are elements of tempo rubato, and to apply these practices without taking time results in a somewhat formulaic effect. The appeal of *Kinderszenen* lies in the charm that every single piece of this cycle possesses. As these pieces are rather short, the challenge that the pianist faces is to enter into a mood, capture its essence, and then leave it almost immediately in order to create another for the next piece. It seems self-evident that one of the pianist's main tools in this endeavor is the flexible treatment of time. To my taste, Staier could experiment more with tempo rubato in general.

The real pearl of this CD is the *Scherzo, Gigue, Romanze, und Fughette*, op. 32, which is hardly ever heard in today's concert repertoire. Staier's strong command over rhythmic precision and his unyielding inner drive lend these pieces an exuberant character. His long-standing engagement with early eighteenth-century repertoire also seems to come in handy with these fairly strictly composed pieces.

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Koch's and Staier's very different recordings of works such as op. 82, op. 126, and parts of op. 68 illustrate just how widely interpretations may vary, even when historically-informed performers use period instruments. This variety shows clearly that no one holds the license to a more valid performance style. *Urtext* editions, period instruments, and historically-informed approaches do not dictate one single interpretation but rather allow for a wide variety. What really matters, as much for Schumann's works as for any other nineteenth-century composer's, is to engage with these tools as a means to an interpretive end, so that it becomes possible to hear the music again with new ears.