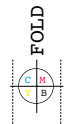


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free-standing in a way that the earlier *Phantasie* was not.

The Introduction and Allegro appassionato was composed in September 1849 in a little more than a week, shortly after Schumann completed the *Konzertstück* for four horns. (To make matters more confusing, Schumann also referred to Op. 92 as a *Konzertstück*.) Clara premiered it a few months later in Leipzig, with great success. Poetic reflection and passionate exuberance comfortably coexist in this work, which makes its relative neglect that much harder to understand.

The Concert Allegro was written in August 1853, shortly before Schumann began composing his ill-fated Violin Concerto. As a result, it is tempting to look for similar defects in this work. Indeed, it is played even less frequently than the Introduction and Allegro appassionato. In his biography of the composer, Ronald Taylor refers to its 'somewhat pallid language, lacking incisiveness', although biographer John Daverio admires the way in which Schumann integrates 'soloistic display' with the work's thematic development. The work, while once again premiered by Clara, was dedicated to the 20-year-old Brahms, who had been introduced to the Schumanns around this

time. Clara adored the young composer, and Schumann referred to him as 'a genius' in his diary, and as a 'young eagle' in a letter to Joachim.

In addition to the *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra, Schumann wrote two symphonies in 1841: the 'Spring' Symphony (No. 1), and what became known as his Fourth Symphony. (Although the 'Fourth' was his second symphony to be completed, it was revised and published in the 1850s, following the 'Rhenish' Symphony.) Yet another important orchestral work was composed in that year: the Overture, Scherzo and Finale – 'virtually a symphony without a slow movement,' as Ronald Taylor writes. (As usual, Schumann dithered over what to call the new work, and 'Suite' or 'Sinfonietta' also were considered as possible titles.)

Both the Fourth Symphony, in its original version, and the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale were premiered in Leipzig in December 1841, but they were not the only items on the program. Schumann's new works were overshadowed by the appearance of Franz Liszt, who played not only his fantasy on themes from Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* but also – as a duet with Clara – his *Hexameron*, a crowd-pleasing set of

Robert Schumann composed almost all of his works for solo piano during the 1830s – a tumultuous decade for the composer, as he gave up his dreams of becoming a piano virtuoso, but fell in love with another one: Clara Wieck, the talented young daughter of his erstwhile piano teacher. The road to Robert's and Clara's union was a long and difficult one. Papa Wieck placed many obstacles in their path. Finally, in 1840, he admitted defeat and the lovers were married.

Shortly thereafter, Schumann began writing what he called a *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra with Clara in mind. (In fact, his *Phantasie* was influenced by a concerto that Clara herself had written some years earlier.) After a trial performance of the work in August 1841, the work was shelved, probably because Schumann realised that a single-movement work would have only limited appeal, and in the latter part of 1841 he had too many irons in the fire – most notably his Fourth Symphony – to attend to extending the *Phantasie* into a full-length concerto. It would be another four years until Schumann wrote the two remaining movements. In spite of the hiatus, he impressively recaptured the ebulliently passionate mood of the *Phantasie* in the Intermezzo and in the Allegro vivace finale. The concerto seems to have been

composed in a single gesture, and describes a perfect arc of romantic feeling in which self-doubt and morbid emotions are completely absent. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Schumann had little use for grandstanding virtuosity, and the concerto's technical difficulties are hidden beneath bushels of flowers, rather than highlighted.

The horn is a notoriously treacherous and exposed instrument. Accidents will happen even to the most experienced hornists in concerts and recitals, and when they do, there's little hiding them. Composing a horn concerto is tempting fate. Imagine writing one for four horns! Small wonder that Schumann's *Konzertstück* (Concert Piece) for four horns is so infrequently performed. This work dates from 1849, a particularly fruitful year for the composer, as it also saw the completion of dozens of songs, music for Byron's *Manfred*, the *Waldszenen* for piano, the *Fantasiestücke* for clarinet and piano, and the Adagio and Allegro for horn and piano. Experience writing the latter work probably gave Schumann courage to move ahead with the *Konzertstück* not long after. (In 1849, the valved horn was a relative newcomer among musical instruments, and composers were still discovering its potential and its limitations.)



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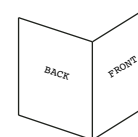


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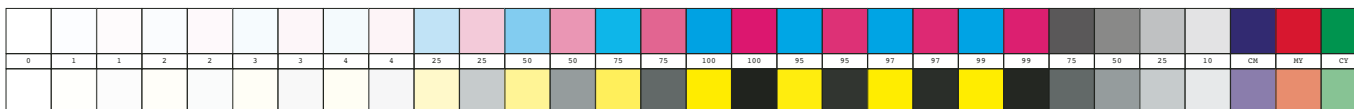
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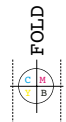


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The title implies a work in one movement, but actually, the *Konzertstück* is a small concerto, or concertino, in three movements. The energetic and masculine outer movements surround a tender Romanze of melting beauty. Schumann rarely gives his four soloists a rest, and so the *Konzertstück* is a test of stamina, as much as it is a test of the soloists' technical and interpretive abilities.

In September 1850, about a year after completing the *Konzertstück*, Schumann left the political unrest of Dresden and moved to the provincial city of Düsseldorf, where he had been invited to take on a relatively unchallenging post leading the local orchestra and choir. (No doubt he hoped that he would be able to devote more time to composition away from the responsibilities and stress of Dresden.) The always practical Clara accepted piano pupils. Within about two months he had completed a major new work – the Cello Concerto – and he began work on a second, the Symphony No. 3 ('Rhenish'), almost immediately afterwards. The concerto wasn't actually published until 1854, however, and it wasn't performed in public until 1860, four years after Schumann's death.

As was often the case with Schumann, the title he gave the Cello Concerto provided clues as to how he viewed the music. In his personal catalogue of works, he once again called it a *Konzertstück*. In other words, as with the aforementioned work for four horns and orchestra, he did not feel obliged to adhere to the characteristics of standard concerto form. The Cello Concerto's three movements are linked together, and there is a little of the standard interplay between soloist and orchestra that one expects in a traditional concerto. Similarly, and as in the Piano Concerto, the emphasis is not on feats of obvious technical showmanship, but on expressive song. This may explain why Schumann's Cello Concerto never has been as popular with audiences as those by Dvořák or Elgar, for example, despite the advocacy of many of the world's greatest cellists.

The Violin Concerto, composed in 1853, is a problematic work, mostly because of Schumann's deteriorating mental and physical condition during the last few years of his life. (Warning signs had been present since at least 1844, however.) Today, it is largely accepted that Schumann's long and slow decline was the consequence of tertiary syphilis. Like most people in the latter stages

of an acute illness, Schumann had good days. September and early October of 1853 must have contained a stretch of some of the better ones – if also some of the last – because it was during this time that he composed the Violin Concerto.

Despite the fact that the work was finished in less than two weeks, the quality of the end-product caused concern. Shortly after completing the concerto, Schumann sent it to violinist Joseph Joachim for his comments. Then, Schumann's health forced him to relinquish his official post in Düsseldorf, so the possibility of a performance receded. For a time, Joachim is known to have played the score privately, and to have discussed it with friends and colleagues, including Johannes Brahms. However, as if the experience were too painful, he stopped doing even that. In 1898, he listed both the work's virtues and its faults, and concluding that the latter outweighed the former, gave orders that the work was not to be published until the centenary of Schumann's death in 1956.

Then something really bizarre happened. In 1937, Joachim's grand-niece, the violinist Jelly d'Arányi, claimed that Joachim's spirit had commanded her to rescue the Violin Concerto from its resting place. Despite the

objections of Schumann's daughter Eugenie, who was the Prussian State Library to argue with Joachim's ghost? The concerto's premiere took place later that year. Listeners can decide for themselves whether or not the concerto suffers from the defects of construction and inspiration that Joachim ascribed to it.

Schumann's Piano Concerto has almost completely overshadowed his two smaller works for piano and orchestra: the Introduction and Allegro appassionato in G (Op. 92), and the Introduction and Allegro in D minor (Op. 134), also known as the Concerto Allegro. Today, as in Schumann's time, short works for soloist and orchestra present a practical challenge for concert programmers; engaging a soloist for some ten or fifteen minutes of music is not cost-effective. Apparently, Schumann's attitude toward single-movement concerted works changed during the 1840s. If the 1841 *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra seemed incomplete to him at the time, and in need of expansion, no such concerns seem to have arisen concerning Op. 92 and Op. 134, which were publicly performed shortly after their completion. On the other hand, perhaps Schumann perceived the two later works as



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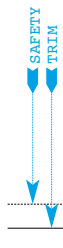
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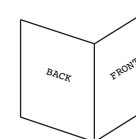
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