Do you like Schumann?

Sir András Schiff in conversation with Professor Bernhard Appel about Robert Schumann*

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A: Dear Maestro Schiff, welcome and many thanks in advance for kindly agreeing to have this conversation here with us. A conversation about Schumann at a historical location which certainly has an inspiring effect. I would like to expressly thank again my two former colleagues, Ms Kämpken and Mr Ladenburger, for indeed taking the trouble to … to set up a special exhibition here lasting less than twenty minutes, and I would be grateful if later on you could have a look at the objects exhibited in the two display cabinets, which are from the holdings of the Beethoven House, all Schumann-related items, and perhaps we could also refer to one or other of these items in the course of the conversation.
Maestro Schiff, I do not have to ask you about the actual title … *Do you like Schumann*. You have indeed demonstrated this sufficiently. You have, so to speak, encyclopaedic access to Schumann's music, not only the piano music but also the chamber music and, of course, the concertos and you have also recorded songs with Mr Schreier and Robert Holl, which means you have a huge wealth of experience which we would like to find out more about, your experience and your way of handling this music. The first question which probably

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Prof. Dr. Bernhard Appel in conversation with Sir András Schiff, Schumannhaus Bonn, 6. 7. 2016 (Photo: Barbara Frommann)

all of you are interested in is when did you encounter Schumann for the first time, via which works, and what did this trigger and bring about for you?

S: Right, this happened at a very early stage, when I was about six or seven years old. It is wonderful that Robert Schumann thought of children also, in *Album für die Jugend* [Album for the Young]. For instance, when you play the violin or other instruments that are much more difficult than the piano. When children study music, this should be enjoyable and not just hard work and a duty, and then we as pianists are very happy that composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and not least Robert Schumann also composed beautiful original pieces for children. Well, you can play this at an early stage already, the first pieces from the "Album for the Young", whereas when you play the violin or the cello or other instruments, you very often play not very interesting music … for instance, exercises … you have the same for the piano, terrible exercises by Czerny or finger exercises by Hanon, so it is really beautiful to also

play these Schumann pieces which include all that poetry already and this wonderful poetical and musical language and I adored this … right away. And it remained like this, during all my life until today and, hopefully, for as long as I live, this very close relationship to Schumann's music simply remains.

A: The "Album for the Young" also included, and this was Schumann's didactic concept, a collection of more than 60 Musical Rules for Life and the Home. Did they already play any role for you at the time or did you come across them only later?

A:This came much later, well, dealing with the whole world of literature, and what was also important for me was that I had learnt German as a child already, thanks to my parents who also spoke German. But this was still common practice in Hungary at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Then, although it was in communist Hungary, I had private lessons in German. And this was very important because I believe Schumann's music with no knowledge of German and with no relationship to literature … this is a half-open world only. I do not know how other people do this without a word a German … I just pity them.

A: I think we will come back to that point. You still have not recorded the pieces from the "Album for the Young" ...

S: Please don't … no, not recorded, yes, but I always play this for myself at home ...

A: May we hope ...?

S: We may hope … [laughing]. I would really like to record this now, namely on a historical instrument. All right, I still do not know which instrument exactly but I have got some ideas already.

A: Just a little note in between … you can see in the display cabinet behind me that the original copy of the "Album for the Young" is a small booklet which Schumann had created for the seventh birthday of his little daughter Marie. This is a collection of small pieces of

which six were then actually included in the Album. This was the core idea and Schumann's concern, which can be seen quite well in the instance of this booklet, that is, to make yet another journey through the history of music with a collection of small pieces, starting with Handel, Bach, through to his contemporaries Mendelssohn and Spohr. Not all plans are achieved yet, so, do you reckon you will create a link when doing the recording?

S: Well then, let's go the whole hog … [laughing, audience laughing]. Yes, of course, this educational and pedagogical aspect in Schumann is also very important. There is again this idea of his to write his own music, his best music for children but also that children should be raised with the best music from the past. This means Bach, above all ... this should be [...] – in this sense I have always followed Schumann until today –, the *Wohltemperierte Klavier* [Well-Tempered Clavier] is my daily bread, every day.

A: You have just highlighted the literary reference in Schumann … there are actually many open literary references, I am thinking, for instance, of a poem that is prefixed to imagination, by Friedrich Schlegel, or Hebbel's verses, the disreputable place in the *Waldszenen* [Forest Scenes], and there are many titles of a narrative nature, *Kinderszenen* [Scenes from Childhood], *Ballszenen* [Scenes from a Ball], "Scènes mignonnes", these are all evocative titles, and we know that Schumann always attached great importance to having those titles added to his music afterwards … although this was not always the way it went, as can be proved with some manuscripts. But this is perhaps not that essential after all. My question … how important are these literary allusions, for instance, *Papillons* [Butterflies}, or *Flegeljahre*, [The Awkward Age] by Jean Paul, for you when interpreting?

S: They are enormously important. As I said, it would not be possible to play this music without these associations. This is not abstract music. And these associations are of enormous help to us, the interpreters. My God, we … well, I am an associative person anyway and I always think of metaphors and images but I would not like to always share this with the audience [smiling]. This is a private matter because one of the beauties of music is that it is also a freely associative art.

Well, I do not have to dictate to you what you are supposed to think of now [audience laughing]. Thank God. But, still, there are some categories. Well, nowadays, nothing is self-evident in music, unfortunately, in musical culture, we got as far as the audience sometimes having to wonder whether a given piece is tragic or comic [audience laughing]. And it is not necessarily … well, for me at least, it is self-evident where, for instance, a Beethoven piece is comic … or a Haydn piece. As you well know, Haydn is a master of humour. But for many people, many people here in Germany, I am sorry to say it [audience laughing] but you are not supposed to laugh during concerts. They are always dead serious. Come on, please, humour is something magnificent and humour is something very serious [audience laughing]. But Schumann still helps us a little bit, for instance, in *Davidsbündlertänze* [Dances of the League of David], where he dictates "with good humour" … yes, not even with bad humour [laughing, audience laughing]. And this is mind-bogglingly funny, or there is also a piece "wild and cheerful" in the second book of the "Dances of the League of David", so, there are these instructions by Schumann or a motto by Schumann, I actually did not understand why those literary instructions or mottos by Schumann were so often [...] in the first edition and he later crossed them out. Do you know why ...?

A: No, I don't.

S: Nor do I [audience laughing]. And I very much regret this. Simply because, once he writes something [...] like "Ganz zum Überfluss" [in addition], well, that is, at the end of the "Dances of the League of David", Eusebius still thought the following "Ganz zum Überfluss meinte Eusebius noch Folgendes; dabei sprach aber viel Seligkeit aus seinen Augen" [… and at the same time there was so much blessedness in his eyes"] – well, this is so beautiful. Perhaps I should play this for you ... [Getting up and going to the piano behind him and starting to play]. This is the penultimate piece and now this comes "Ganz zum Überfluss" [continuing to play]. Without this motto, it would be totally different. So, this is of great help to me, these poetic instructions by Schumann. And everything is symbolic, this is why, for instance, the contra C sounds twelve times, so it is midnight, there is twelve times this low C, this is no coincidence.

A: But there are also, of course, descriptions, I am thinking of playing instructions like "quasi oboe" in the piano movement …

S: Yes, this is beautiful. Namely that the first 24 opus numbers of Schumann are all piano works, without exception. Still, he writes for the piano in quite a strange way, so it is an entirely new way of writing for the piano. But it is very often of an orchestral nature also, if we think of the Sonata in F minor, with subtitle "Concerto without Orchestra" … and in the Sonata in F sharp minor, there is a passage "Like an oboe". This is highly associative also and I even always try to play the piano in a way that is never sounds like a piano [audience laughing]. Please don't, for God's sake. All the rest is sometimes orchestral, sometimes like a cello, sometimes like an oboe … and, above all, like the human voice. If some people think the piano is a percussion instrument, they are wrong. Unfortunately, many people, especially in this day and age, very often just hit the piano. But if hit a grand piano, it hits you back [audience laughing]. Brutally. And this is exactly the art of playing the piano, to give the audience the illusion that it is not a piano. That it is an orchestra or this or that instrument … and that it is a singing and speaking instrument. And Robert Schumann did exactly that in a wonderful manner and he was aware of it. He also wanted … right, we all know he wanted to become a pianist and then he maltreated his hands and what perhaps made him so sad was that he could not achieve his pianistic dreams. But then he continues to live in Clara's art and in his compositions. Anyway, he became a fantastic piano composer amongst others.

A: You have already mentioned a short while ago the particularities of Schumann's musical language which is, of course, very difficult to describe. There, I would like to come back to an aspect which, I believe, perhaps plays an eminent role in your interpretations, namely the role of the so-called middle parts, the filling parts. The fact is, just to describe it very briefly, that the melodic cores, motifs and themes are often so interwoven with the filling parts and in this way undergo a permanent transformation of nature, that the plain melody is eventually, so to speak, no longer its true self due to this minor matter, namely the filling parts. This is a pianistic challenge, as I can imagine, one aspect of your interpretation which seems quite obvious to me. How does one learn this kind of analytical playing? Do you think analytically?

S: Oh yes, very much so. I think analytically. Although, during a performance or a concert, you should forget about the analytical aspect. This is again a private matter. At home, in your music room, when practising or studying, this is when you have to analyse, but otherwise the audience is not interested in any analyses, I believe. Or can you do a lecture and analyse … which would make giving a concert like seeing a psychiatrist [audience laughing]? This is not what people want … do they [smilingly addressing the audience]? I am not sure, I believe not. So, analysis and integration. You have to integrate these elements and you also have to … Schumann is a very good example here because everything sounds so "improvisational", like just happening to be there … whereas it is designed in an incredibly precise manner. Still, during a performance, you have to be able … to convey the impression of improvisational, this is very important. And with regard to your question about the middle parts, my great teacher there is and remains Johann Sebastian Bach, polyphony. This is because … in a Bach fugue, there is no such thing as melody and accompaniment, this does not exist. There are certain parts and these parts are on an equal footing. You cannot audition a Bach fugue in a didactic manner, now I am highlighting the theme, for instance, … this would be stupid. Because everybody knows the theme already. You have to pay attention to all parts. Of course, this might perhaps also be an illusion because we are all human beings … I do not know how many things you can concentrate on at the same time?

A: Not too many.

S: You certainly can. Well, it all depends. Right, I admit I concentrate on one thing at the time … [audience laughing] … and the other ones just come along with me. Still, in the case of Bach, you must not neglect even a single part. And I believe that all the great masters including Schumann, they are all pupils of Bach. In the very best sense. Schumann's music is also incredibly polyphonic. There, parts and part leading play a very important role as well. Although this is no longer the way it is with Bach where there are very often main and secondary parts and even middle parts. But this has to be … take, for instance … [standing up and going to the piano] … you all know something like this … [playing] … well, if here, if you just concentrate on the

melody, this might be very beautiful but it is very primitive. [continuing to play]. Something operatic [continuing to play] and this is so sophisticated, with those middle parts … [continuing to play]. This is because [getting up and returning to his seat] the piano is a polyphonic instrument.
And this exactly is art when there are perhaps six or seven parts around … six or seven or eight part chords, and you have to mix and balance these parts. No note is as strong as the following one. I can demonstrate this to you like this … [getting up and returning to the piano] … that such a chord … [playing] … eight parts. I can play this like that … [continuing to play]. And depending on which part … [returning to his seat]. I would like to highlight a bit more. This is something you cannot do on a harpsichord. But, at the time, someone like Bach or Handel or Scarlatti who composed for the harpsichord did know that … people simply used to compose differently. But as of around 1770 or 1780, with the appearance of the first fortepianos, such dynamic shadings were already possible and feasible. And composers started to write differently. Which means that, in the case of Schumann, the polyphonic aspects must be observed very carefully also. This is very important. Of course, pianists and also the audience very much tend to look upwards, in the fine arts as well. For instance, architecture. You always look at the tower of a church, without thinking that there must also be a foundation. Without that, this tower would not stand. Similar to music where the foundation is always underneath as well. Bass … building up from the bass. And then letting the overtones flourish.

A: Another note on musical language. The harpsichord, of course, did not have any pedals either, as the great achievement of the pianoforte was precisely the development of the pedals, and the pedal also plays a very important role in Schumann's music. I am thinking now specifically of the last number of the *Papillons*, there is a passage, twenty-five bars long, an organ pedal tone which you have to hold, which is audible ...

S: Right ...

A: ... and then there is the famous passage at the end, a seven-part chord, A major, and the sound is subtracted, you then take this off one after the other, the A remains in place and then becomes the fifth of the final chord. This is sound magic which you create here. My question is about … modern pianos have a perfect construction in the pedal area. I should think this plays an essential role, to be able to express such nuanced sound finesse at all. We know, however, that you also deal with historical pianos where things are a bit different ...

S: Yes, but it is not that much different. Of course, the sound is different but this, for instance, was a brilliant idea by Schumann, the [getting up and going to the piano] end of the *Papillons* … [playing] … and now there is this seven-part … [continuing to play]. Did you hear that? This is important … so … [playing]. Here, the pedal is actually irrelevant when you take off one note after the other and only this A remains in place … [playing].
Well, perhaps this is also symbolic … hands off, yes … [returning to his seat, audience laughing] … hands off whom? Do you know … [addressing Bernhard Appel]?

A: No, I don't.

S: There are some theories actually … perhaps hands off Ms Carus … no …? Could it not have been …

A: You mean ....

S. Agnes Carus. I have actually heard of such theories already. So, hands off ...

A: There is also a similar effect in the *Abegg-Variationen*, which he added in a re-engraving only subsequently, one of the many innovations which Schumann brought to piano music. But let us stay for another moment with the *Papillons*. If I recall correctly, you said on one occasion that this was a key work of Romantic piano music ...

S: Yes, this is what I think … yes, indeed ...

A: Could you explain this a little bit?

S: Yes … again a work inspired by literature, The *Flegeljahre* by Jean Paul, the final scene … the masked ball. And it is a … a very special kind of music. It is not programme music but incredibly inspired by literature and, to my knowledge, there had never been anything like this in music before. And, in particular, not in instrumental music and not in piano music. And then, all right, Opus 1 is the *Abegg Variations*, a beautiful work and very much inspired and … but there had been variations before that already, even magnificent variations. But something like the *Papillons*, these chameleonic very short vignettes, well … and a ball scene … and, really, the pieces sometimes only last a few seconds and all have very different keys and are of different natures. And […] some person enters the room and starts dancing and then disappears again. Then the next one arrives and then a few more appear. And all this so … later on, Schumann wrote *Carnaval* and even in larger formats but never again something as utterly ingenious as the *Papillons*. I really consider this a most important work. We will now play a version of it with the Salzburg Marionette Theatre. I am otherwise absolutely against arrangements but this is a fantastic group and I am very much interested in it. Because these are dances … waltz and polka and polonaise and all those beautiful dances and then there is grandfather 's dance … [humming]. Well, this is so … this is … what can I still say about the *Papillons*. Not a lot. You have to listen to it. These days it is played far too seldom.

A: What you have just described coincides with a statement by Schumann who said about the *Papillons* that they destroy each other. And he recommended to have a glass of champagne between the individual items ... [audience laughing, András Schiff smiling]

S: Yes, that would be a good idea. But then you are not able to [play} … I can only drink this afterwards [audience laughing]. Schumann might have been able to do that, even between the pieces ...

A: Perhaps I should mention very briefly, since we are gathered in this very place, that Schumann, when he was housed at the clinic, composed again no. 10 of the *Papillons* from memory, although one entire

tone lower. I think the movement is in B flat major, the memory one … the tenth item. The original notation is in C major. Also, it is not exactly identical to the original version. This just as a side note since we are here, so to speak, at the place of rebirth of … one item of the *Papillons*. At the beginning, you already spoke about humour and in a way anticipated a bit a subject that is very important to me. You are one of the few pianists to play Schumann's Humoresque [*Humoreske*]

S: Yes, I am … but there are quite a few already …

A: It is an enormously long piece and I think it is also an enormous physical and mental challenge to play this piece. It is almost one thousand bars long, was created in Vienna in 1839 and also played a certain key role because other composers started imitating this type of movement structures. There is a passage which I focused on some time ago. The inner voice, what can you do with the inner voice. You can hear it but only you can. In this passage, the piano movement is noted as […] a triple system and the middle part is called the inner voice. What does that mean and what does it mean from the point of view of playing technique?

S: You do not have to play the inner voice … [smiling].

A: OK but you can sing it …

S: But sing it only inwardly. And hear it inwardly. And this you can […] make audible. But what the inner voice tells you, well, this again is … in a most poetical sense … [getting up and going to the piano] … if I now … I have not played this for a long time but … [starting to play]. You have to hear it but you cannot play it [continuing to play / singing]. Perhaps something like this … [returning to his seat]. Well … but I do not know how to do that [audience laughing]. I simply think of this voice very intensively and hope it will take me somewhere.

A: But it is basically an appeal addressed to the interpreter which actually remains hidden from the audience, unless one knows about it.

S: Yes, hopefully …

A: At a level like "quasi oboe", it is you who will recognise it but the audience must know about it.

S: [...] The piano can do a lot and it is therefore no accident that it was not just […], well, the greatest virtuosi like Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, well, who were fantastic pianists. But there were also others like Schubert, Schumann or Brahms, well, to write such works for the piano. And I would not choose the piano as my favourite instrument either, I do not like it at all … [audience laughing]. I would very much like to play the cello, a wonderful instrument. But what do I play in the afternoon … [audience, Bernhard Appel laughing]. There is no repertoire. Or the horn … that would be marvellous. So […], if I could play the cello, I would always play string quartets. That would save my life [audience laughing]. But I really opted for the piano because of the literature. Because of this unique repertoire. This is really not comparable to all the other ones. And it is really an instrument that can stay in the living room and it is simply there and the composer can just come and compose there and … or improvise or so on. But there are also things which the piano really cannot do. For instance, producing a perfect legato. Or doing a crescendo while holding a tone, which a singer can do [humming]. I cannot do this on the piano. Because if I play a tone on the piano, no matter how beautifully and with what idea behind it, from the moment of the first touch it starts going into a diminuendo and the tone slowly but surely dies off. This is inexorable. Still … in spite of all those shortcomings, you can create illusions and Schumann also … was also fascinated by this. Later on, yes … […], I am talking mainly about this first stage and we will talk about Schumann's late work afterwards. I find it is a terrible prejudice to say, well, Schumann's late work and how insane it is and how all those mental circumstances play a terrible role there. I find much of Schumann's early work much more "insane", such as *Kreisleriana* or the Sonata in F sharp minor, which is, well, something completely torn up and often a deeply depressive music. I never find this again in later works. So that … still, the prejudice against his late work persists to this day.

A: I would really like to come back to this but, in the meantime, may I just refer again to the *Humoreske*. Schumann had written an article about humour … that is, musical humour … and actually also wanted to write a treatise on humour but, unfortunately, in the end he did not get round to it. What is there so humorous about the *Humoreske*? He certainly does not invite us to slap our knees or to laugh out loud ...

S: No, not that ...

A: There is a passage which, as regards the metre … or several passages which, as regards the metre, are mad … humorous. How would you see the concept of humour embedded by Schumann in this work?

S: Right, humour, I think I do not consider this work a humorous work but humour as a state of mind … and the most varied states of mind, too, yes. There are some funny parts in the *Humoreske* … [getting up and going to the piano] … like, for instance, this passage here [playing] … or this [continuing to play, then returning to his sear] … this is like a bogeyman [audience and BA laughing] … like the one with whom you frighten children, indeed. If you do not behave yourselves, … will come, how do you say that in German?

A: Knecht Ruprecht, that is, Servant Rupert ...

S: Right, so, these […] are the funnier parts but this is actually not humorous in the usual sense. But you also find such features in other great works like *Kreisleriana*, also in the *Davidsbündlertänze* [Dances of the League of David], also in *Carnaval*, well, there are always those kaleidoscopic features.

A: You just brought up his exciting and sometimes even really bizarre and confusing sounding early work. Later on, Schumann actually revoked this in a way in the form of new editions, by presenting other versions and talking about it himself that in those works he had somehow overreached from a compositional point of view. I know you do not fully agree with Schumann's self-assessment in this respect, as far as the version is concerned. The early and the late …

S: ... this is very interesting in Schumann because in other composers, Schubert being a good example … well, there, if you look at Schubert's early versions or the sketches, he just corrected them and always came up with better results, whereas I find it was often the other way round in Schumann who was, of course, almost pathologically self-critical and perhaps he was simply not happy about it … I am not sure either but one should really not blame Clara for this, for God's sake … actually, I have the greatest esteem for Clara Schumann who was a wonderful woman and a wonderful artist. I do, however, not know why Schumann so often corrected his early versions and often erased or changed absolutely brilliant ideas, and I very often tend to be in favour of these early versions and to come back to an early version, but perhaps this is not correct from a musicological point of view. Many musicologists give me a hard time … [audience laughing] … but not all of them. Because what is important to musicology … and this is right … is the final version. Right ...?

A: This has actually changed …

S: OK, well ...

A: There are now definitely trends in scholarly editing to take original versions just as seriously …

S: Yes, and it is important that you also … it is wonderful for musicology that you also talk about different versions. And you have to know them. But, specifically, the wonderful *Fantasie* [Fantasia in C major] … the title page is here in the display cabinet [pointing at it in front of him]. For me, this is a major work by Schumann, a major work in the history of European music altogether, for me, it is absolutely the most wonderful love poem in music. And it is very interesting that, in this way, the whole world knows about this Fantasia. I was once approached by a fantastic musician, Charles Rosen, an outstanding American pianist and musicologist and one of the most intelligent people I have ever seen …, met. At time, I was still living in Budapest and Charles Rosen came to see me and said: You live in Budapest [...] I heard there was a copy of Schumann's Fantasia at the National Museum of Budapest with a completely different close to the one that is

known. And could you please arrange for a copy of it to be sent to me. This was very difficult in Hungary at the time with all that Communist bureaucracy but I was lucky and was able to have a copy made for Charles Rosen and one for me also. And this close is absolutely fantastic. Well, as you know, there … [getting up and going to the piano] … in the first movement of the Schumann Fantasia, this is also quasi a commemoration of Beethoven when he quotes … [playing]. And this is a quotation of … [continuing to play] … *An die ferne Geliebte* [To the Distant Beloved] by Beethoven, right … and then this at the close of the last movement [...] in this Budapest version [getting up and returning to this seat] … I will play this to you at the end but not yet … [everybody laughing] … and he puts a fermata on a diminished seventh chord, then there is silence and, from this silence, this theme returns most magically … by Beethoven … this Beethoven quotation of *An die ferne Geliebte*. With different harmonies, indeed … coloured differently with miraculous new harmonies and, with this, Schumann closes the circle, yes … this is then so circular, something like remaining again with Beethoven, something like the final movement of Sonata Op. 109, where the beginning meets the end. This takes us again back to the history of music, to the *Goldberg Variations* by Johann Sebastian Bach and then … but then Schumann quite clearly …

A: ... deleted

S: … deleted this close … and … well, mea maxima culpa, but I do play this close because it touches me so much and so … it simply grips me, this … I think the well-known close of the Schumann Fantasia is very beautiful but, compared with the Budapest close, it is absolutely conventional but this does not bother anyone. This [pointing at the piano] bothers quite a few [laughing] … and then really a lot of musicologists told me, no, you must not play this, this is what Schumann deleted, this is not the final version. So I did a recording with both closes, yes … a Solomonic solution … [everybody laughing].

A: Perhaps just a quick reminder: The Fantasia was created in connection with the planning of the Beethoven Monument here in Bonn, there was an appeal in 1835 which Schumann himself took up and reinforced in his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, the New Journal for Mu-

sic, and his idea was to become active himself, to support the project, namely with a composition which eventually became this Fantasia. In the display cabinet here … [pointing diagonally in front of him] … you will find both the first edition prefaced with a Schlegel poem and a draft of the title page … I do not remember exactly the actual text … obols, that is, donations, to Beethoven's monument and then there are movement titles, poetic titles, with indication of what was still Opus number 12 at the time, in the margin it says one hundred copies, I believe for the Association, so this was meant to be the donation. But it came to nothing. To cut a long story short, the monument still needed a long time, it [...] materialised in 1845 only, and when Schumann published this work, he dedicated it to Franz Liszt who later on gave it back to him, so to speak, in the form of the Sonata in B minor, and the Beethoven traces were, of course, associated with this thought of a monument. It is basically a dedication to Beethoven, musically expressed by a quotation. And I find it absolutely convincing, I mean those versions which were temporarily considered equal by Schumann at some stage. Even though they were not published, it was, of course, possible to play them.

S: Even autobiographically, that is, *An die ferne Geliebte* and the separation from Clara and the whole piece is really a love message. By the way, those titles … [pointing at the display cabinet] … like trophies or palms or later the starry nights, these are so … so wonderfully poetic titles which afterwards I miss very much. So, it is very good that we know about it because in later editions and version he deleted all that systematically. I do not know why ...

A: You have already mentioned your manuscript studies and I know that you basically use any opportunity arising to study manuscripts. You also campaigned for facsimile editions, I am thinking, in particular, of Dvořák's piano concerto or your support for a facsimile edition or the acquisition of the *Diabelli Variations*. When you study manuscripts, I hope you are not doing that because you do not trust the musicologists … [everybody laughing].

S: No, quite the contrary. I really have great respect for musicology, that is … I have a great many friends amongst musicologists. We re-

ally also have to work together hand in hand. This is a … it is a great pity that so many practising musicians are afraid of musicology or … well, science, knowledge, there is nothing wrong with it … [everybody laughing]. You even have to do that. Many practising musicians think that, well, do not ponder too much … all you have to do is just start playing instinctively. This is … this will not do … You cannot do that. All right, I agree the instinctive side should prevail when playing music but the intellectual side also plays a major role when you play and listen to great music. This is not so easy … oh, how interesting, I just let myself being carried away now. There are so many dimensions ...

A: But when you study manuscripts, the aura of the original is, of course, fascinating, I believe that goes for all of us. But what does that possibly mean for your interpretation …? I think we saw it in the Fantasia, there are consequences to this.

S: Indeed, consequences and also … I live manuscripts passionately, there, I feel close to the composer. This is also like … it can also be a letter. Although it might perhaps be very impolite to read other people's letters but this is what we do these days. Well, and this will, I am afraid this will die out now, as there will be nobody to read the collected e-mails of x or y … [everybody laughing] …

A: This is highly likely.

S: … or publish them. Or perhaps I am wrong. But this is a manuscript, this is something beautiful, it … I actually learnt a lot from Stefan Zweig, for instance, this love for manuscripts. And there are very different manuscripts, well, sometimes I have got one in my luggage every day, and to every concert I take a manuscript, a facsimile of Bach. There are … these are mainly the two and three part Inventions or the first volume of the Well-Tempered Clavier. There is not a single correction, it is incredible. It is, of course, a fair copy but, still, one can only marvel. So, this man, when did he do that, with so many children running around … [audience laughing] … screaming and shouting and I do not know what else, and still manage to complete all this. But what fascinates me about Bach in the manuscripts is not

only the flawlessness but also the waves … If you now take modern sheet music, this looks very nice and important but it is only a text output, everything is so geometrically clear and there are straight lines and then you also tend to play Bach in the same way … a bit like a telegraph, right. So daddadadda … [beating time] … very often this is like that. New objectivity … [audience laughing]. On the other hand, if you look at the manuscript, there are waves, right, not a single straight line, only waves, and the music flows. Like a stream or like the sea but never shallow. So, then again it is fantastic to see Beethoven's manuscripts which are very different. Well, it is a cliché to think that all of Beethoven's manuscripts are very chaotic. Some of them are and other ones are incredibly clean. And very often in the lyrical pieces, well … for instance, the last Sonata for Violin, Op. 96 … [humming]. You can actually see this lyrical tenderness in Beethoven's way of using the pen. This manly tenderness, it is very much inherent in Beethoven. And then it is very important to sometimes look at the compositional process … in Beethoven, in Schubert, in Schumann. That is, when are corrections made and how and what are the different stages of a given composition. So, this is an excellent opportunity for us interpreters and we must really make use of this. And for this reason, cooperation with musicology is again important because not we are important but Schumann is important, Beethoven is important, Bach is important. So, we are all here for them. I am firmly convinced of that. Many people say this is rubbish, they say … interpreters behave like servants of the composers. I think this is not rubbish. I am not ashamed at all of being a servant of these great composers. At the same time, you still have your freedom, even though you have to respect the sheet music one hundred per cent, one thousand per cent. So, wherever Schumann writes forzando or subito piano, I am not allowed to play subito forte and vice versa. Still, all interpretations of these masterpieces are very different from each other. Even amongst interpreters who all follow the sheet music conscientiously. So, I think there is no danger that it will become boring. For instance, the wonderful pianist Claudio Arrau advised young musicians in his book not to be afraid of being boring. Because what does that mean, boring? So, what is perhaps boring for one person might be highly interesting for me. And this is very dangerous when interpreting musicians now want to be very original and very interesting and are just intent on

that. This is always a complete flop … [audience laughing]. You must not do that. You need to trust the work and the composer and not interpret for the sake of good appearance and effect but for the sake of inwardness. Following the inner voice …

A: You are one of the first pianists, as far as I can see, to have interpreted Schumann's late work which is actually a late work from a biographical point of view only and not comparable with the emphatic late work of, for instance, Beethoven. You have been dealing with this late work, you have often played and even recorded *Gesänge der Frühe*, the "Songs of Dawn", these are fairly strange and unconventional pieces, and I would now risk to say they are absolutely unpianistic ...

S: Yes, you are right [everybody laughing]. Absolutely unpianistic. Finger-breakingly unpianistic. And even quite a bit of this could be … well, the … the first and the last piece could be sung a cappella. That would actually be very beautiful. I do not know if anyone has tried this already. But the middle pieces, well, they are almost unplayable and extremely ungrateful. Still … well, I am always fascinated by works that are unpianistic. Because this is challenging. You then try to find a way. There is a piece which reminds you very much of the *Ride of the Valkyries*. You would definitely not like to play this on the piano. And then there are these wonderful so-called *Ghost Variations*, you know … this is also displayed here in the cabinet [pointing behind him] which is closely connected to this place and I have always played this again and again and will keep doing that. Because it is so incredibly moving, absolutely. Yes, you all … yes, you all know this story when he wrote this theme … [getting up and going to the piano], … a fantastic theme [playing – returning to his seat]. Yes, and then Schumann said … well, that the spirits of Schubert and Mendelssohn had appeared to him in a dream, you know …?

A: Yes, I do.

S: And dictated this theme to him. Although he forgot that he had already composed this theme earlier in the violin concerto … in the slow movement of the violin concerto. And partly in the String Quartet in F major also. So, it was a theme created by Schumann himself. And then

he started to compose the variations but he had an attack after the third or fourth variation and then …

A: This was interrupted.

S: And then he threw himself into the Rhine but he was saved. And then he still wrote a last variation and that was it. And then he entered the asylum in Endenich. It is an incredibly personal and moving story but also the piece itself, the music is fairly unique. And, again, the inner, the introverted, the quiet … the quietest voices prevail. It is no outer, no outer music at all. Nor is it music for public performance. I do play it but I ... sometimes I almost feel ashamed to play this because it is not for the general public. But I also believe ... after such a piece you cannot applaud. What for? Still. One should always play and listen to this as a testament.

A: Right. Looking at the clock. I think we could still carry on talking for a long time. I had noted down a few things which, unfortunately, did not come up in the end. I think we should all thank you now for this really enlightening conversation and we believe your interpretations will perhaps now be received differently by us, as certain things were simply unknown to us before. So, our sincere thanks for this conversation. I do not know; you also still want to watch football today ... [audience laughing]?

S: Yeeeaaah, later. But I think, since I talked to you about this earlier this [Budapest] close of the *Fantasie* [op. 17}.

A: Oh yes, sorry ...

S: I will still tell you that [audience applauding]. Well, before we move on to football … [audience laughing]. So, may I play this for you, the last movement of the *Fantasie*? [Audience applauding, András Schiff is going to the piano]. Regarding the Budapest close … well, by the way … I have a difficult relationship with my home town and home country, perhaps you know this all of you. What happens nowadays in Hungary is not very pleasing but all the more beautiful is the music [laughing] and this close. So, this is the whole third movement with this close [playing].