ROBERT SCHUMANN
1810-1856

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.54

Allegro affettuoso
Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso –
Allegro vivace

Up to the age of 30, Schumann concentrated more or less exclusively on small-scale pieces – songs and piano music. But in 1840, his long desired marriage to Clara Wieck, daughter of his former piano teacher, changed the direction of his career.

Clara Schumann was one of the most remarkable women of her time. A fragile, appealing child with dark hair, delicate features and huge eyes, she was destined from birth by her ambitious father to take the world by storm. At the age of nine she made her first public appearance at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, followed two years later by a complete recital there and the first of many European tours. She was not only a phenomenal pianist, acclaimed by Goethe, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Paganini, but she could also sing, play the violin and compose. At the age of 19 she was appointed Imperial Chamber Virtuoso to the Austrian court in Vienna, and was elected to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. But shortly before, Clara had fallen passionately in love with Robert Schumann, nine years her elder, whom she wished to marry. Wieck, jealous of his precious daughter's happiness, worried about the deleterious effect of marriage on her highly lucrative career, and unimpressed with Schumann's uncertain prospects, refused his consent, and the lovers began a bitter three year battle which ended in the courts amid wild and slanderous accusations. They won their case and were finally married on 12 September 1840, one day before Clara's 21st birthday. With a courage and steely determination belied by her frail appearance, Clara went on to bear eight children in the next 14 years, continued her career while coping with the strain of household duties and family, survived her husband's tragic mental disintegration and early death, supported her young family single-handed by playing and teaching, and still found time to encourage and offer advice to other composers, including Johannes Brahms.

In the first year of their marriage, Schumann's relief and happiness expressed itself in the famous 'Year of Song', but his astute wife soon realised that success would depend on his branching out into the larger orchestral forms. Her support and gentle coaxing bore fruit: between 1841 and 1853 Schumann produced four symphonies, six overtures, three concertos and other orchestral works. His first symphony, the *Spring*, was conceived in January 1841 and first performed under Mendelssohn at the Leipzig Gewandhaus at the end of March. Over the next two months, Schumann worked on the *Overture*, *Scherzo* and *Finale*; and in just one week during May, he produced another orchestral work, an A minor *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra. Clara, heavily pregnant, rehearsed the piece with the Gewandhaus Orchestra on 13 August, but two weeks later she gave birth to her first child, and the *Fantaisie* was not publicly performed.

Schumann had been toying with the idea of a piano concerto for some years, making several abortive attempts during the 1830s which all either foundered completely or emerged as works for solo piano. But in 1841 he clearly had no plans for developing the *Fantaisie* further, and it

remained unpublished for another four years, by which time the Schumanns had moved to Dresden. In June 1845 he added another movement to the original piece, and in little over a month a three-movement concerto had emerged, with the original *Fantaisie* as its first movement. On 1 January 1846, just five weeks before the birth of her fourth child, Clara gave the première of the concerto, again conducted by Mendelssohn, with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Perhaps because of its lack of showy virtuosity, the work was coolly received, and a further performance in Vienna 11 months later also failed to elicit an enthusiastic response. Clara was bitterly disappointed, but Schumann took the blow philosophically, telling her that 'in ten years' time all this will have changed.'

Schumann was right: the concerto subsequently established itself, even within Schumann's own lifetime, as a major masterpiece of the repertoire, much played and imitated (Grieg's Piano Concerto was unashamedly modelled on Schumann's, even using the same key). All three movements are closely related thematically and more directly by quotation from the first movement, which Schumann described in its own right as 'something between symphony, concerto and grand sonata'. Certainly, few 19th-century concertos to date managed to achieve such an eloquent blend of lyricism and buoyancy, presented as a dialogue *inter pares* for soloist and orchestra, with particularly important solo parts for the oboe and clarinet. Many of Schumann's large-scale symphonic movements are criticised for their reliance on a text-book adherence to formal principles, but the first movement – perhaps because it was first conceived as a fantasy, rather than a concerto – is anything but hidebound by convention. Tunes pour out, one after another; but, because they are all so clearly related, the listener follows Schumann's argument without question. The effect is a mosaic of highly contrasted sections linked by the coherence of the tonal scheme and a dramatic fitness of each episode, each one growing logically out of the one before, in the manner of his large-scale solo piano works like *Davidsbündlertänze* and *Carnaval*. The ternary-form *Intermezzo* maintains a serene but optimistic mood; the question and answer between the piano and orchestra at the opening ushers in the middle section with a more expansive theme on the cellos; this phrase is finished by the piano, like one spouse finishing the other's sentence. Its material is subtly derived from the opening theme of the first movement, which returns in a more clearly recognisable form in the march-like coda leading straight into the effervescent A major finale. Its swashbuckling first theme, almost like a quick waltz, is succeeded by a deliciously ambiguous second theme, sounding like another march but still written in 3/4 time.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
1770-1827

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 *Choral*

Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo: Molto vivace
Adagio molto e cantabile
Presto Allegro assai

Beethoven's last symphony had a much longer and more painful gestation than any of his previous works. The idea was conceived as early as 1812, the year in which he completed the Seventh and Eighth symphonies, but it was another five years before a tentative four-movement plan emerged, in response to an invitation from the Philharmonic Society of London to write two new symphonies. Even then, Beethoven laid the work aside once more, concentrating instead on piano music - the *Hammerklavier* Sonata (dedicated to his talented young patron, the Archduke Rudolf of Austria) and the *Diabelli Variations*. He also began a new mass to celebrate Rudolf's forthcoming enthronement as Archbishop of Olmütz; but this work, the great *Missa solemnis*, also took much longer to complete than Beethoven anticipated, and was not finished until the autumn of 1822.

In that year, having completed another three piano sonatas (Opp.109-111), Beethoven resumed work on the Ninth Symphony. For many years he had been toying with the idea of a 'choral' symphony, and particularly with setting a text by the German poet Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). Schiller's passionate devotion to the cause of individual freedom, expressed through hard-hitting social and political dramas, and his paeans to the idealistic human values of hope, love and brotherhood, appealed greatly to Beethoven. As early as 1793 the year in which Louis XVI of France and his queen (widely perceived by 'enlightened' intellectuals as tyrants rather than victims) went to the guillotine the young composer had declared his intention of setting Schiller's famous *Ode to Joy*, with its democratic sentiments of universal fraternity. In 1808 Beethoven made his first attempt at marrying voices and orchestra within the framework of a largely instrumental work. His vocal setting on an earlier song (*Gegenliebe*) in the *Choral Fantasy* for piano, chorus and orchestra, shows striking similarities to the eventual theme and treatment of the *Ode to Joy*. But the concept did not come easily: Beethoven's 1822 sketchbooks reveal many attempts at the famous melody that was eventually to accompany Schiller's uplifting words.

At this stage, his plan was to write two separate symphonies: a purely instrumental one for London, and a 'German symphony' ending with 'Turkish music and a vocal chorus'. Gradually the two ideas fused into a single entity: by the early summer of 1823 he had virtually completed the first movement; by August the *Scherzo* was sketched; and by October the *Andante* had taken shape. The choral finale, however, continued to pose problems. According to his friend and biographer, Anton Schindler: 'When he reached the development of the fourth movement there began a struggle such as is seldom seen. The object was to find a proper manner of introducing Schiller's *Ode*. One day entering the room he exclaimed: "I have it! I have it!" With that he showed me the sketchbook bearing the words, "Let us sing the song of the immortal Schiller Freude", whereupon a solo voice began directly the hymn, to joy.'

The entire symphony was sketched out by the end of 1823, and written out in February 1824: it had taken about six and half years from the time Beethoven first sketched the theme of the opening movement. The first performance took place at the Kärntnerthor Theatre in Vienna on 24 May 1824, in a programme that also included sections of the *Missa solemnis* and an overture. The stone-deaf Beethoven who had long since retired from 'conducting' his own works insisted on 'directing' the performance from the conductor's podium, although the orchestra relied on the first violin, Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and the Viennese Kapellmeister, Michael Umlauf, who beat time. According to one of the violinists who played in that historic performance: 'Beethoven himself conducted, that is, he stood in front of a conductor's stand and threw himself back and forth like a madman. At one moment he stretched to full height, at the next he crouched down to the floor . . . he flailed about with his hands and feet as though he wanted to play all the instruments and sing all the chorus parts . . . Beethoven was so excited that he saw nothing that was going on about him, he paid no heed to the bursts of applause, which his deafness prevented him from hearing in any case . . .'

According to the same source, 'the work was studied with the diligence and conscientiousness that such a huge and difficult piece demanded . . . An illustrious, extremely large audience listened with rapt attention and did not stint with enthusiastic, thunderous applause.' Beethoven's friend and biographer Schindler stated that the 'musical success of this memorable evening could be favourably compared to any event ever presented in that venerable theatre. Alas! the man to whom all this honour was addressed could hear none of it, for when at the end of the performance the audience broke into enthusiastic applause, he remained standing with his back to them. Then it was that Karoline Unger [the contralto soloist] had the presence of mind to turn the master towards the proscenium and show him the cheering throng throwing their hats into the air and waving their handkerchiefs. He acknowledged this gratitude with a bow. This set off an almost unprecedented volley of jubilant applause . . .'

But other eye-witness accounts tell a different tale. Joseph Carl Rosenbaum reported that the theatre was 'not very full . . . many boxes empty, no-one from the Court. For all the large forces, little effect. B's disciples clamoured, most of the audience stayed quiet, many did not wait for the end.' And this was underlined by the poor box-office receipts - only 420 gulden, far short of Beethoven's expectations: indeed, he collapsed at the sight of the disappointing figures. Shortly afterwards, the embittered composer took Umlauf, Schuppanzigh and Schindler out for a meal at a tavern in the Prater, where he accused them, quite unjustly, of conspiring to defraud him. After enduring his tirades for several minutes, his guests walked out, leaving the furious composer 'to vent his anger at the waiters and the trees'. The rift with Schindler remained unhealed until just before Beethoven's death.

After a period of calmer reflection, Beethoven announced to his friends that he felt he had committed a blunder with the last movement of the symphony, and had decided to replace it with a purely instrumental finale, but this plan was never executed. Part of the reason for the Ninth Symphony's patchy initial success lay in under-rehearsal and its extraordinary innovations. Another eye-witness, Leopold Sonnleithner, reported that 'the whole symphony, especially the last movement, caused great difficulty for the orchestra, which did not understand it at first, although leading musicians were playing in it. The double-bass players had not the faintest idea what they were supposed to do with the recitatives. One heard nothing but a gruff rumbling in the basses,

almost as though the composer had intended to offer practical evidence that instrumental music is absolutely incapable of speech. The more often this gigantic work was performed subsequently, the better the musicians and the audience came to terms with it . . .'

By 1826, two years after the première, Beethoven had sufficient confidence in the symphony to dedicate it to the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III, for which he received a letter of thanks and a diamond ring in token of the King's 'sincere esteem'. Meanwhile the London Philharmonic Society paid Beethoven £50 the original fee proposed back in 1817 for the Symphony, of which they received in due course a copy inscribed to them. It seems clear that the Society expected that the music would be their property, but in this, they were sadly mistaken: Beethoven was too wily a businessman to assign his works outright to any one body. Nevertheless, a year later, when the composer lay dying in great pain and distress, the Philharmonic Society generously raised £100 to 'be applied to his comforts and necessities during his illness'. Beethoven responded immediately, promising to express his gratitude by sending the Society 'a new symphony . . . or a new overture or something else that the Society would like', and enclosing a list of metronome markings for the performance of the Ninth Symphony. The promise remained unfulfilled: on 26 March 1827 he died after weeks of the most terrible suffering, his spirit unbowed and defiant to the end.

The whole Symphony is planned on a huge scale. It is the only one of Beethoven's symphonies that has no repeat of the first movement exposition, but nonetheless the movement plays for more than a quarter of an hour. The opening of the Symphony is one of the most radical and influential things Beethoven wrote. It emerges out of silence, a bare fifth on the horns, second violins and cellos. The first violins echo the two notes sotto voce, as the wind instruments gradually join in. The crescendo builds to a fortissimo statement of the main theme played by the full orchestra, more or less in unison. This effect, of music emerging out of silence as a primitive force of nature, has been copied again and again throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, perhaps most effectively in the symphonies of Bruckner. After a slightly varied repeat of the shimmering opening, the music moves to B flat and, strangely, Beethoven modulates not to the relative major of D minor, F, nor to its dominant, A. Instead he continues in B flat as the key for the second-subject group, an extended section with no one clear theme, rather a whole kaleidoscope of thematic fragments. The exposition ends, very firmly in B flat, with the whole orchestra emphasising the key fortissimo. Then, quite unexpectedly, Beethoven returns to the very opening of the movement, as if there were to be a repeat of the exposition. Instead, this red herring introduces the development section, a device Beethoven had already used in his String Quartet Op. 59 No. 1. The development is a thorough working out of the material from the second subject group, exploiting in particular the themes most suitable for contrapuntal treatment. The recapitulation is something of a shock, too, beginning fortissimo instead of pianissimo, and in the key of D major rather than D minor.

The *Scherzo* is placed second. It is on a similar scale and, unusually for a *scherzo*, treats its main subject as a fugue. The trio shifts into duple metre, for an episode at once more lyrical and rustic, before the repeat of the *Scherzo*. The slow movement is, rather like some of Haydn's slow movements, a set of double variations on two themes. Here, Beethoven's themes are in different keys, the first in B flat and the second in D, they have different time signatures, 4/4 and 3/4, and they are at different speeds, first *Adagio molto* and secondly *Andante moderato*. Each section is varied, the second returning truncated in G major, before Beethoven abandons variation form (if not the techniques of variation) and the rest of the movement - about a third of it altogether -

concentrates entirely on the main theme, slipping into 12/8 as the violins play ever more elaborate decorations to the theme.

And now Beethoven is faced with a problem. After all this originality, what to do for a finale? The full orchestra poses this question in a cataclysmic, dissonant outburst, and a strangely melodramatic recitative on the cellos and basses. Beethoven first suggests going back to the opening movement but this absurd idea is brushed aside by the cellos and basses with another impassioned recitative. So he tries the *Scherzo*. This again is brusquely rejected, as is the attempt to return to the music of the slow movement. Finally, Beethoven hits on the material he is looking for. Ushered in by the wind, after one more recitative, cellos and basses alone play the now-famous tune. How shocking this simple yet noble tune must have seemed in 1824, played so baldly. Such a theme is only really suitable for variation treatment, and this is what Beethoven does. But there is an even bigger surprise in store. The progress of the variations is interrupted by the same cacophonous outburst that opened the finale. This time it is followed, not by a string recitative, but by a real baritone soloist declaiming the words of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*: 'O friends, not these sounds rather let us strike up more pleasing and more joyful ones!' He is joined by the chorus and three other vocal soloists to continue this set of free variations, one of which is a jaunty little 'Turkish'-sounding march for the orchestra alone: perhaps Beethoven was suggesting that even the Muslim Turks, for centuries Austria's sworn enemies, should be included in his great vision of the universal brotherhood of man. A tenor solo leads to a massive fugato, before the full chorus bursts out with a jubilant statement of the hymn-like theme. Men's voices in unison, echoed by the women, declaim 'O you millions, let me embrace you!' and, for a moment, the finale pauses for a passage of rapt mystical contemplation, before a triumphant double fugue, interrupted just once more by the hushed entry of the solo vocal quartet, builds to a great choral peroration, an audacious climax to one of the most radical works in all art.

The monumental Ninth Symphony sums up Beethoven's symphonic career. It encompasses struggle, triumph, humour, tenderness and unshakable spiritual confidence. 'I shall never crawl', wrote Beethoven, 'My world is the universe'. More than any other, this work should, as Hans Keller remarked, 'convince even the firmest pessimist that mankind's life has been worthwhile'.

An die Freude

O Freunde, nicht diese Töne! sondern lasst uns angenehmere anstimmen, und freudenvollere.

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder,
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Wem der grosse Wurf gelungen,
Eines Freundes Freund zu sein,
Wer ein boldes Weib errungen,
Mische seinen Jubel ein!
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
Sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!

Freude trinken alle Wesen
An der Brüsten der Natur;
Alle guten, alle Bösen
Folgen ihrer Rosenspur.
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,
Einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben,
Und der Cherub steht vor Gott.

Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen
Durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan,
Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,
Freudig, wie ein Held zum Seigen!

Freude schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder,
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, überm Sternenzelt
Muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.

Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Such' ihn überm Sternenzelt!
Über Sternen muss er wohnen.

Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805)

Ode to Joy

O friends, not these sounds - rather let
us strike up more pleasing and more joyful ones!

Joy, lovely divine spark,
daughter from Elysium,
drunk with ardour we approach,
celestial one, your sanctuary!
Your magic re-unites
what custom sternly separated;
all men become brothers
where your gentle wings tarry.

Whoever has enjoyed the great fortune
of being a friend to a friend,
whoever has won a dear wife,
let him contribute his rejoicing!
Yes, even he who has but one soul
on the face of the earth to call his own!
And whoever has not, let him steal away
weeping from this assembly!

Every creature drinks joy
from the breasts of Nature;
every good thing, every bad thing
follows in her rosy path.
Kisses she gave to us, and wine,
and a friend tried in death;
even to a worm ecstasy is granted,
even the cherub stands before God.

Just as gladly as His suns fly
through the mighty path of heaven,
so, brothers, run your course
joyfully, like a hero off to victory!

Joy, lovely divine spark,
daughter from Elysium,
drunk with ardour we approach,
celestial one, your sanctuary!
Your magic re-unites
what custom sternly separated;
all men become brothers
where your gentle wings tarry.

O you millions, let me embrace you!
Let this kiss be for the whole world!
Brothers! above the tent of stars
a loving Father cannot but dwell.

Do you prostrate yourselves, you millions?
Do you sense your Creator, world?
Seek Him above the tent of stars!
Above the stars He cannot but dwell.