



6 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Li Ming Qiang

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so? **Yes, Chopin is played much more than Schumann in China, both in concert halls and music schools. The reason, if I put it in a most simple and direct way, Chopin is more universal, appeals more to the masses. Schumann is more personal, appeals more to the elites.**
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example? **Being Chopin a pianist himself, his works are mainly conceived for the piano. When people use the word "pianistic", it means that the pieces lay easily, naturally and smoothly under the fingers. This is true for Liszt and Debussy too. While Schumann's piano music is conceived more instrumentally, not necessarily for piano. This is true of Beethoven and Brahms too. Let me just cite some very simple examples:
a) "Von fremden Laendern und Menschen" (first piece from Kinderszenen, op. 15)
b) "In der Nacht" (the 5th piece of Fantasiestücke, op. 12)
c) Opening four pages of Humoreske, op. 20.
All the middle voices you have to divide between right and left hands. Actually if we would have a third hand we could play this much better and easier.**
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin? **I have too many favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin. Just mention a few:
Schumann: Kreisleriana op. 16, Fantasie op.17, Humoreske op. 20, etc.
Chopin: Preludes op. 28, the Ballades, Sonatas Nos. 2 and 3, Fantasy op. 49, etc.**
- 4** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public? **In China we normally play only Schumann's work up to op. 99. But with the new six volumes of G. Henle's Schumann Complete Piano Works I found his late and lesser known works interesting and inspiring as well. I will try to teach more of the late works in the future and hope our audience will accept them too.**
- 5** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public? **Chopin's early piano Sonata, op. 4 has been almost never played in China. This work is Chopin's very first big structure piano music he ever composed at that moment. I think it was an experimental try for him. Although Chopin is the most popular western "classical" composer in China, nevertheless at this moment, I think, the most important thing for us Chinese is to learn, realize and absorb the essence and spirit of western culture and music but not to take the "complete".**
- 6** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work? **Schumann's Fantasie, op. 17 and Chopin's Fantasy, op. 49 both are great music but they are totally different. For me, great music cannot be compared to each other, just like great composers cannot be compared to each other as well.**

李 名 强



9 Questions for



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Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Christian Zacharias

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so? **Is that so? If that is the case, then maybe the reason is that Chopin was the first piano composer who knew exactly how to make piano sound reach fullness, radiance and grandness. What to regard and what, by all means, to avoid. Chopin was keenly aware of the overtones and he did take care of them so artfully. Schumann's piano settings mostly evolve around the middle range of the piano keyboard, and lastly also for that reason his music is much more difficult to play. Often enough the result is mediocre sound (in both senses of the word) if you do not work strongly on highlighting the individual lines of the texture.**
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example? **First of all it goes without saying that Chopin wrote pieces (and passages) that are tremendously difficult to play, even to the point of being almost unplayable. But still I am inclined to agree with you. Like I said, it is very, very hard to play Schumann's piano music with radiance and fullness.**
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin? **In Schumann's works I am especially fascinated by the cycles, those brief, almost fragmentary movements that seemingly conclude as if asking a question, the harmonies remaining. I think greatness is achieved in the "Davidsbündlertänze" or the "Kinderszenen". My opinion of Chopin has changed since my youth when I played much more Chopin than now. But spontaneously I would say my favourite pieces are the Barcarolle, the Fantasie in f minor, the Ballades and Scherzi, the Sonata in b minor.**
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons? **I don't think I will ever perform Chopin's first piano sonata; it is not on the same level as the following ones. With Schumann I avoid the early "Impromptus", and in the "Nachtstücke" and "Waldszenen" I find that the individual movements are not all on the highest level. There is magnificence in "Album für die Jugend", but in other pieces – please forgive me – some things come close to the commonplace. I continuously feel inclined to orchestrate "Gesänge der Frühe" and not to play it on the piano. I still intend to study the Sonata in g minor.**
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public? **Schumann's late piano oeuvre I find somewhat disconcerting. I suppose your statement regarding the "unpianistic" texture (see question 2) becomes most clearly evident here. But the "studies for the pedal piano" (op. 56, 58, 60) I find superb. When I conduct I add the so often and so strongly scolded violin concerto to the programme as frequently as I can. I rank it among the greatest of Schumann's creations.**
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public? **See answer to question no. 4**
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work? **Chopin's Fantasie is one of his greatest masterpieces. He seldom wrote anything as near to perfection as the middle part of this Fantasie in f minor. In regards to Schumann's Fantasie, that I have often performed, I am torn. The second movement is the truly great Schumann, the Schumann I have loved since my own youth. The first movement is still quite a task for me, for instance in always grasping the music in relation to Liszt (the harmonies). The hymnal texture of the third movement is unique, and I would say it's already anticipatory of the late Schumann.**

8 Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?

Thankfully I am totally independent of such anniversaries. But I have begun to rehearse Chopin's second concerto again and will perform it in Warsaw. Exciting for me, because I last played in Warsaw in the 1970s.

9 Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?

Schumann's greatness as a song composer goes without saying. If you sing the melodies of Chopin's piano works you will realize that they are filled with song, even with chanson. I am very enthusiastic about Liszt's adaptation of the Chopin song "A Maiden's Wish". Take the time to listen to recordings of this piece by some of the great musicians (Josef Hofmann or Rachmaninov) of the past.

[Originally in German]

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christian Zentgraf". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C'.



9 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Lars Vogt

- 1 Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so? **Presumably it has to do with the fact that it's easier to "collect credit points" from the audience with Chopin than with Schumann, because Chopin's melodic structuring is easier on the ear. I personally play much more Schumann, and have so far hardly performed Chopin, though I do love his music very much.**
- 2 Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example? **I repeatedly observe that the piano setting, or more generally speaking the way someone writes a piece of music for a certain instrument, often reflects the writer's temperament, his personality. With Schumann there is, in the truest sense of the word, a method to the madness. An example: The concluding section of the second movement of Fantasie op. 17 on which I am currently working again. The extraordinary difficulty of the leaps in opposite directions reflect the "madness" that carries this movement to the extreme. A kind of desperate joy and forced exuberance that is directly expressed in the writing.**
- 3 Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin? **That's difficult, because both composers have so richly bequeathed us pianists. Momentarily I am again totally in love with Schumann's Fantasie op. 17. To be honest I very especially enjoy playing Chopin's posthumous nocturne in C sharp minor that I often play as an encore. But I find the Ballades and Préludes tempting as well.**
- 4 Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons? **No. I would not generally rule any piece out.**
- 5 How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public? **I played "Bunte Blätter" quite a lot over a period of time, but of course they are from different periods. Also some chamber music like the "Märchenerzählungen" the violin sonatas, piano trios. "Wonderfully touching", "mysteriously moving" would be a description that comes to my mind in regards to Schumann's later oeuvre.**
- 6 How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public? **No, I never played it. Considering that I haven't yet performed many of his main works I do not think that I will study it at all. Of course one feels the immense talent of the creator, but in its conclusion it does not appear to me to reach the overwhelming maturity of the piano concertos of even the 20year old artist.**
- 7 Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work? **That is a little bit like waging Gauguin against van Gogh ... Both are exceptional pieces. But, to me, Schumann's Fantasie in its inner poetic dimensions can be counted among the best works in the entirety of musical literature. Insofar I would say I do have a preference there, but I also love Chopin's Fantasie.**

8

Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?

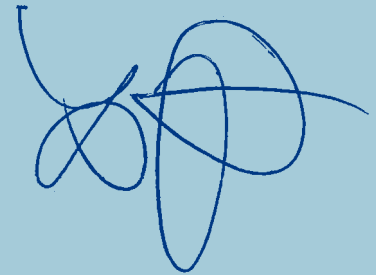
I studied Chopin's first piano concerto especially for the anniversary concert in Warsaw. I welcomed the occasion as a good reason to master this great piece that I have always passionately enjoyed. As mentioned before regarding Schumann I've returned to the Fantasie op. 17 which I will be recording with Berlin Classics for the Schumann anniversary year.

9

Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?

I think both composers thought and felt highly poetically. In Chopin's case seemingly more without words. In Schumann's songs one painfully feels how intensely he himself internally experienced what is described in the texts he used. I am thereby ever and again deeply moved. However, I cannot discern a direct influence on the pure piano oeuvre.

[Originally in German]





9 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Marc-André Hamelin

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so? **Chopin's pianistic production is overall more voluminous and somewhat more consistent in emotional substance, however wonderful much of Schumann's work is.**
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example? **I firmly believe that neither composer's writing is especially pianistic. In both cases there are many thorny problems which, if not solved through much hard work, make it difficult for the music to shine through.**
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin? **Schumann: Papillons op. 2, Carnaval op. 9, Fantasiestücke op. 12, Fantasie op. 17 (but the choice isn't easy). I'd say also the Davidsbündlertänze op. 6, but I haven't actually played them yet. Chopin: too many!**
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons? **There are a few works of Chopin's, such as the Bolero, the Allegro de Concert and the op. 4 Sonata which to my mind are almost totally devoid of real interest and substance, so I wouldn't spend any time with them.**
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public? **The latest Schumann I've played is the Waldszenen. Aside from these and the Bunte Blätter, I think I'll stay with early Schumann ...!**
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public? **There are so many works in the repertoire that are more musically rewarding! The op. 4 sonata has always seemed to me to be a very, very poor specimen; it's almost unbelievable that it came from Chopin's pen.**
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work? **This is a little bit like being asked to choose your favorite among your own children. Maybe some would – I wouldn't! Both Fantasies are towering masterpieces, period. Interestingly though, if Chopin had added two movements to his Fantasie, the comparison might be a little easier; this might have resulted in something that is a little closer to what Schumann produced, at least in scale. But let us simply be thankful for the existence of these two essential works!**
- 8** Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they? **If I am asked to play specific works in order to commemorate anniversaries, I generally comply, but on the whole I do not tend to take these anniversaries into account when building programs.**
- 9** Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre? **Chopin did not need to append words to music to make it songful; in fact it seems to me that he does better without them! Incidentally, their lack of popularity must largely be due to their being set to Polish words, and as far as I know, translating them would lessen their effect.**

Marc-André Hamelin



6 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Elisabeth Leonskaja

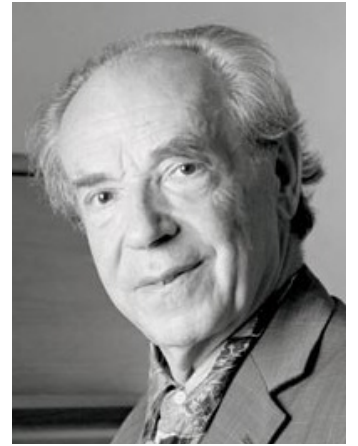
- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so? **There are several reasons: Chopin wrote many small pieces – mazurkas, waltzes, préludes, nocturnes – many more than Schumann. That covers the needs of millions of amateurs who love music, but do not command the instrument well enough and who love Chopin’s music. It enters their ears and reaches their hearts. In contrast, almost every simple piece of Schumann’s has a hidden secret (with few exceptions, for example the Arabesque). Such a seemingly easy piece like “Des Abends” or some of the pieces from “Kinderszenen” can only be played by accomplished musicians. As regards students I find it quite obvious why they prefer Chopin – it is because of the etudes! Nobody can bypass Chopin’s etudes!!! They are milestones of virtuosity and musicality both. And he composed complex pieces like the scherzi or ballades that are not too lengthy. Those are very welcome tasks. Schumann’s pieces – after all he himself was not a virtuoso, but instead an unparalleled poet – are more peculiar in their virtuosity and especially in their expression (“Abegg variations”, “Aufschwung”, “Grillen”). There are very few pieces by Schumann where a “general romantic mood” reigns (for instance the first movement of the Fantasie, but there also you will search in vain for the ordinary or commonplace).**

In short, one must not compare these two geniuses. Neither is overshadowed by the other, and advantages of the one are not shortcomings of the other. Schumann is certainly less conventional than Chopin, but that does not lessen the poetic expression of his works. Chopin is more fantastical, but that is not criticism of Schumann’s oeuvre.
- 2** Schumann’s piano setting is reputed to be much less “pianesque”, and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin’s. Would you agree? Can you cite an example?
Schumann’s many technical difficulties (Fantasie in C major, second movement; the sonatas in F sharp minor and F minor) will always be difficult to accomplish. Many young pianists pick out the „Kreisleriana” and ... play them without comprehension or feeling (except for a few long passages). Slow movements in Schumann’s sonatas (unproportionately short, but what contents! what radiance! “Verweile doch, du bist so schön!” – “Stay a while, you are so beautiful!”) Or the unforgettable intensity in the third movement of the Fantasie! Sviatoslav Richter once said that he felt inhibited to play the third movement, because it is so incredibly deep.
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin?
Many favourites and some special ones; namely Schumann’s “Humoreske” and some of Chopin’s nocturnes.
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons?
The first sonata by Chopin, because he only really came into his own with the sonata form later. The sonata in B flat minor is positively a miracle!!!
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann’s lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public?
I’ve played “Gesänge der Frühe”. Schumann’s late pieces are certainly polyphonic, the sound is almost underexposed and still it communicates. Heavy and beautiful.
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin’s early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public?
See the answer to question 4.

[Originally in German]



9 Questions for



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Paul Badura-Skoda

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so?
Two reasons: Chopin's piano settings are more "pianesque", easier to finger, his piano sound is more "seductive", and is more enchanting than Schumann's. I also play more Chopin.
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example?
This is true in part. Schumann reaches the high piano register much less often than Chopin. The very long 8. Novelette has a Mozartian ambitus, the last 1½ pages of the second movement of the Fantasie op. 17 are almost unplayable.
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin?
Schumann's "Scenes from Childhood" op. 15 and his Piano Concerto in A minor op. 54. Of Chopin's works: the Piano Sonata B minor op. 58.
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons?
No! (One exception: Chopin's posthumous Waltz in E major. Too bad he didn't destroy it!)
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public?
I do not think that the later works are weaker or less inspired than the early ones in any way all. They are generally underestimated. Among others I've played the "Forrest Scenes" op. 82 and "Gesänge der Frühe" op. 133.
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public?
It's a juvenile composition that Chopin himself did not deem worth publishing. I respect his will, even though it does have lovely passages.
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work?
Schumann's Fantasie. It is one of the most genial piano works of the world.
- 8** Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?
I will be playing more Chopin. For 2010 I newly rehearsed some of his Waltzes and Mazurkas op. 30. Of Schumann's works only the five posthumous Symphonic Etudes.
- 9** Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?
This is insignificant for Chopin as a composer of piano music. His songs, for the most part edited by others, are nice occasional compositions. Schumann as a song composer reaches the vicinity of Schubert, alone the preludes and postludes are masterpieces. Many of his piano pieces are "songs without words".

[Originally in German]



9 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Rudolf Buchbinder

1 Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so?
I play much more Schumann than Chopin in concert.

2 Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example?
Perhaps Schumann wanted to take revenge on us pianists. But, whether Schumann, Chopin or also Brahms – they were all pianists with different techniques.

3 Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin?
I don't have a personal favourite piece, otherwise I couldn't play the other works.

4 Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons?
No.

5 How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public?
On occasion I have.

6 How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public?
No.

7 Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work?
In my opinion Schumann's Fantasie in C major is his greatest piano work.

8 Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?
Since I've been performing Chopin and Schumann my whole life there is no need for special treatment.

9 Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?
Schumann was not only a composer of songs, but also of symphonies. All of this is mirrored in his piano works.

[Originally in German]



9 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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Angela Hewitt

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so?
Oh yes, you are right. I think Chopin is perhaps more easily understood at a first, initial level: all the lovely tunes, the nice accompaniment ... this is more easily appreciated without any hard work. That's not to say that there aren't many different levels in Chopin's Œuvre as well. Schumann, with the exception of some very well known pieces, takes more on the part of the listener to really understand it, and of course on the part of the interpreter. For that reason I think it is more difficult. It is known more as "musician's music".
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example?
I think that is true to a certain extent. Schumann's writing for the piano is very orchestral, and sometimes does not lie so easily under the hands. But it is still very well written for the piano and the technique he demands perhaps suits me better than Chopin's. Chopin has more double thirds which I'm not great at!
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin?
In the case of Schumann I always tended to go for the pieces that aren't heard so much. In competitions everybody plays "Carnaval" or the "Symphonic Etudes". But I always tended more to the "Davidsbündler", the Sonata in f sharp minor, the "Novelletten" or the "Humoreske", where I found so much to discover and love. I especially love the dances of Chopin, having been a dancer myself (my solo in Les Sylphides was the Waltz in G flat major!). So I have a particular fondness for his Mazurkas, Waltzes, and the f sharp minor Polonaise. The "Ballades" one hears so often, maybe too often, so I prefer more the "Scherzos" which I play complete. I've never played the third sonata, but the "Funeral March" Sonata has always been one of my war-horses!
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons?
The Schumann Toccata. I simply can't!
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public?
I haven't played any of the later piano pieces. I must try the "Gesänge der Frühe" and others. There is still so much to do and to discover!
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public?
I've heard it only a few times but have never played it.
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work?
I adore playing the Chopin Fantasie, which I studied with Vlado Perlemuter. This Fantasie is so completely different to Schumann's masterpiece. I think only the title is the same. But the Schumann Fantaisie is a piece I must learn before I die because I used to go to bed listening to Catherine Collard's recording of it every night when I was a teenager.

8 Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?

I am actually playing more Schumann than Chopin. But at my festival in Italy I am doing them both justice, because I am playing one Schumann solo recital, and then doing a Chopin recital with the Cello sonata, some of the songs and some piano pieces. I have also performed the Schumann Concerto a lot this year, and the Chopin e minor Concerto with the Polish Radio Symphony on tour. That was fun – playing Chopin with the Poles! Chopin's and Schumann's music is so very different. I find the two just inhabit such different worlds even though they were born in the same year. I rarely put Schumann and Chopin together in the same program for that reason.

9 Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?

Many piano pieces of Chopin are like instrumental songs (the Nocturnes for example). That's really where he sang. The songs for voice are not at all as sophisticated – they are quite simple pieces with nevertheless a great deal of charm. Schumann's songs are pieces of wonder – an amazing collection of masterpieces that are among his best works. I love playing the piano accompaniments to them. A great singer will teach you a lot about how to play his piano works. Playing them with a singer who is also a great musician, you learn about the flexibility that is so necessary in Schumann interpretation and which I find is often lacking in piano performances of his works.

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9 Questions for



András Schiff

Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so?
What you say is certainly true. Chopin is a fabulous composer, but that is known to the entire world. Almost his complete oeuvre is well known and popular, and it is played (almost too) often. (One could discuss at length the abominable way Chopin is overdone by some.)
With Schumann it's quite a different case! His piano works alone are a tremendous oeuvre: They will cover six volumes in the new Henle edition. Some of the compositions like "Carnaval", the "Symphonic Etudes", "Kreisleriana" or the C major "Fantasie" are very popular and are played often. Other pieces like "Humoreske" or "Davidsbündlertänze" are performed less often; but the major part of his piano works are largely neglected. This applies to later pieces also.
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less "pianesque", and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example?
Yes, I agree. The reason is that Chopin wrote for his own hands which were rather strange. For instance, I would describe his first etude in C major (op. 10 no. 1) as not exactly "comfortable". Schumann's style of writing for the piano is very inventive and different. It's quite orchestral, often you hear three hands, rather than two. And his figurations, "fillings" – between the melody part and bass – are wonderfully poetic. A piece like Toccata Opus 7 is incredibly difficult, almost unplayable. To play it is not an athletic feat, rather an expression, a struggle with the impossible.
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin?
No, there are really too many, by both composers. By Chopin perhaps the Préludes and Mazurkas.
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons?
There is no weak piece by Chopin. Still, his music is played so poorly so often, and that does not do him any good. The Sonata in B flat minor and the ballad in G minor are played much very often. It does not mean I wouldn't play them, but I wouldn't do it so much. I played Schumann's Toccata that I just mentioned when I was a young man, as a challenge. Now I cannot anymore. And I would not play his Paganini etudes, not because they are not good, but you need to make a selection, and these are simply not as important within the complete oeuvre.
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public?
I love "Gesänge der Frühe" and "Geistervariationen" passionately, and I have often performed and recorded both. A person who is not deeply moved by this music, is beyond help.
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public?
I am familiar with the sonata in C minor, but I've never performed it, only played it for myself at home.
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work?
Chopin's Fantasie is wonderful, but Schumann's is unsurpassable, almost his major work. It's interesting that Beethoven wrote "Sonata quasi una Fantasia"; our composers here are looking for a "Fantasia quasi una Sonata".

8 Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?

Lots of Schumann and relatively little Chopin. Like I said, Chopin does not need our help, but Schumann does very much so. For this reason I will be playing entire Schumann programmes. He is one of the few composers who can afford it. To me, a programme, exclusively comprised of Chopin, though it is often offered, is not satisfying.

9 Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?

Yes, absolutely. And actually, Chopin wrote music almost only for the piano, genial music. The characteristics of the instrument determine his music. The songs he composed are quite nice, but none of them are truly of an importance. How much more wonderful is his cello sonata. Schumann, on the other hand, created masterfully in all genres, the songs, the chamber music, the symphonies, the choir music, even his opera Genoveva. The piano music is merely a part of an enormously rich lifework.

[Originally in German]



9 Questions for



Famous Pianists on Frédéric Chopin and Robert Schumann

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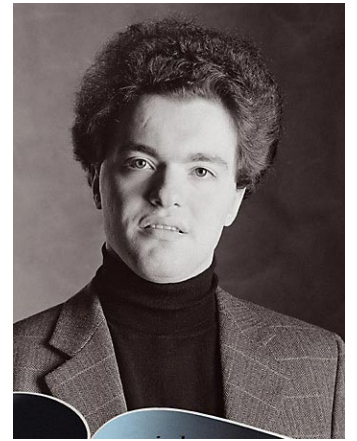
Gerhard Oppitz

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so? **Schumann's music leaves many questions open. Chopin's art reaches the heart without major detours. I play more Schumann than Chopin.**
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less „pianesque“, and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example? **Less „pianesque“, because Schumann's thinking is more in orchestral realms, and he constructs more contrapuntal progressions.**
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin? **Schumann, Fantasie C major, op. 17 – Chopin, Préludes op. 28.**
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons? **No.**
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public? **Genial, visionary, enigmatic. I've played: Fantasiestücke op. 111, Gesänge der Frühe op. 133, Konzertstück d-major op. 134.**
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public? **An intermediate stopping point on this way to mastery – still lacking genial quality. I never played it.**
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work? **Schumann: a brilliant „trilogy“. Chopin: a fascinating „single piece“ (without pauses between movements, cyclic structure). Robert Schumann's opus 17 is more eminent.**
- 8** Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they? **The anniversaries do not specially influence my programme.**
- 9** Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre? **Chopin was an admirable master of cantability. Most of his solo works are truly „songs without words“.**

[Originally in German]



9 Questions for



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Evgeny Kissin

- 1** Pianists the world over play more Chopin than Schumann in concert halls and in the music schools. Why is that so?
This is a question for them; I can't possibly speak for others.
- 2** Schumann's piano setting is reputed to be much less „pianesque“, and therefore less comfortable to play than Chopin's. Would you agree? Can you cite an example?
Yes, definitively. This is obvious virtually in all their piano works.
- 3** Can you name your personal favorite pieces by Schumann and Chopin?
Schumann's: Piano Sonata No. 1, "Kreisleriana", Fantasy op. 17, Piano Concerto, 3 Phantasiesücke for Clarinet and Piano (in the Cello version), "Dichterliebe." Chopin's – I can't: too many!
- 4** Is there a piece by Chopin or Schumann that you would never want to play? If so, what are the reasons?
Yes, there are a few such pieces: Chopin's 1st Sonata, for example, or Schumann's 2nd Piano Sonata. They are objectively far below the level of those works by Chopin and Schumann for which they entered history as great composers.
- 5** How do you feel about Schumann's lesser known late works? Have you ever played any of these pieces for the public?
Less enthusiastic than about the above-mentioned ones. No, never [played for the public.]
- 6** How do you feel about Chopin's early Piano Sonata in c minor op. 4? Have you ever played it for the public?
See answer to question 4.
- 7** Can Schumann's Fantasie be compared to Chopin's? Which of the two, in your regards, is the more important work?
I would say, probably, Schumann's – because it's a more "major" piece.
- 8** Will you be playing especially much of Chopin and/or Schumann during 2010, the year of their anniversaries? Have you perhaps rehearsed new pieces for the occasion? If so, which pieces are they?
Yes, I'll only be performing Chopin and Schumann during 2010. [Rehearsed new pieces:] Schumann's Phantasiestücke op. 12 and the Novelette No. 8, a number of Chopin's Nocturnes and Mazurkas.
- 9** Schumann was an outstanding composer of songs. In contrast, the few songs that Chopin wrote are completely unknown. Do you think that this marked difference had an influence on the piano oeuvre?
No, I can't think of any such influence.

Evgeny Kissin