

Schumann's Piano Concerto op. 54

The New Urtext Edition

Interview with the editor Dr. Peter Jost

G. HENLE VERLAG: Schumann's Piano Concerto lasts about 30 minutes. How long did it take you to edit the music for G. Henle Verlag and Breitkopf & Härtel?

DR. PETER JOST: Well, all in all, I would estimate it took me about three months. Schumann's Piano Concerto is one of the major works in classical music, and both the size and length, as well as editorial aspects pose somewhat of a challenge. Yes, editing can be a very time-consuming occupation.

QUESTION: The history of this work is rather complicated. In 1841 Schumann originally wrote a single movement concerto and called it "Phantasie". It wasn't until he realized he wouldn't find a publisher for the piece that he wrote the second and third movements in order to create a more "conventional" concerto. Does this early version still exist? Do you refer to it in your edition?

JOST: Unfortunately the original version is today undocumented. Major ideas or parts will have been integrated into the first movement, but to which extent and how exactly remains a secret. Schumann's concerto in three movements would never have been written if he had found a publisher for the single movement piece "Phantasie". This is interesting, isn't it? We can speculate on why all the publishers refused it; was it not good? – that I refuse to believe! It seems more likely that the unusual format, only one movement, was not popular enough. But Clara Schumann also wrote a single movement concerto, and the flowing transition to the finale in the original version was not at all common, though Schumann could have encountered something similar in Beethoven's 5th and Hummel's 6th piano concertos.

QUESTION: Which sources refer to and must be used for the piano concerto?

JOST: That is simple to answer: Schumann's own autograph of the score exists, a score that philologists refer to as a "partial autograph", because other people's writing can be made out alongside Schumann's. Clara's handwriting for instance. In addition, we have the first print, dated 1846 and published by Breitkopf & Härtel, those are the orchestra parts and the solo piano. The conductor's score wasn't published until long after Schumann's death, namely in 1862.

QUESTION: Earlier you stated that the editorial aspects and questions were a challenge. You have Schumann's autograph, and you have the first publication. Where is the challenge? Or, in other words, why don't you simply publish the music exactly according to the sources?



Dr. Wolf-Dieter Seiffert (left) and Dr. Peter Jost



Dr. Peter Jost

JOST: (laughs) If it were that easy the Urtext edition would be unnecessary, and the soloists and orchestra musicians could play from the old Breitkopf material. No, admittedly the existence of the sources is an advantage, but as always, the devil is in the detail.

For example, let me comment on the consideration of the posthumously published score. Since it is a posthumous publication, one is inclined to give it no notice, and assume it's not at all important. Far from that! We know of a letter Schumann wrote to his publisher, Breitkopf & Härtel, in 1853, this was seven years after the first edition was published, in which he asks for several corrections of the musical text. He adds a list of corrections. Of all things, this list is lost! But Breitkopf did not transfer the corrections to the already published material, rather – presumably – only to the posthumously published score (1862).

Thus, in comparing the score with the parts you find many minor and major deviations. Which of these originate from Schumann's list of corrections? Which of them originate from an able editor or proof-reader? And which of them might be type-setting errors? My solution to the problematics of evaluating the sources is such that I do not disregard the posthumously published score, but I don't overrate it; and, by the way, the same is true for Schumann's autograph. It is an incredibly important document. But every little thing in the musical text that differs from the first publication must be very closely questioned. Did Schumann himself make changes during the printing process (that would be a completely normal procedure) or did a type-setting error go unnoticed (that also happens).

So, how do I proceed? My main source is actually the first edition published in 1846. But whenever my text differs, in other words: if I believe other, so-called "readings" from secondary sources to be truer, then I use them, for that reason. However, in these cases, I am always sure to include a comment and argue my point in the "Critical Commentary". That's good Urtext tradition.

QUESTION: Could you give us an example for an especially interesting passage where the Henle/Breitkopf edition reveals something new?

JOST: Happy to. An especially noticeable passage is the beginning of the second movement, where [in the Henle Urtext edition] we correctly start with the note f^1 . In all other editions you will here, erroneously, encounter an e^1 . Allow me to comment on the editor's problem here. This here is Schumann's autograph, the first page of the slow movement:



We are talking about measure 1. It's circled.

No doubt, Schumann has written the famous right-hand three-tone upbeat: $e^1 + g^1 - f^1(!) + a^1 - e^1 + bb^1$. This is what we reproduce in the Urtext edition:

Intermezzo

II

Andantino grazioso ♩ = 120

What is the problem? Well, the first publication, authorized by Schumann himself in 1846, starts with an e^1 instead of the f^1 of the autograph. We even have Schumann's so-called "reference copy", that is his personal copy of the first publication into which he later entered various corrections. This particular passage in the first measure remained unchanged. The posthumous score also has e^1 .

So Schumann corrected and e^1 is right? So far, all the existing versions have stuck with this, whereas few people bother to ponder such "readings", and continue to reprint the version in the first edition. I am convinced that, in this case, the autograph is correct, and that the print contains an unnoticed type-setter's error. My reasoning: This is the one and only place, only here in the first measure does the first edition read e^1 . In each and every other passage [in the concerto] where the upbeat recurs, whether in the piano voice or the orchestra material, there is always an f^1 : Look at the piano in measure 69, and look at the second violins in measures 17 and 85: consistently f^1 ! The parallel in measure 69, I think, is especially revealing. If Schumann had really and purposely wanted to change the original f^1 to an e^1 , wouldn't he then have been careful to change this second passage also? But no: in the autograph he doesn't elaborate this parallel measure, rather he refers with numerals to the beginning of the movement (by the way, you can see that very well in the images of the first page, where, above the measures, you can easily decipher "8" and "9" etc.). And in the first edition, as in all other editions to this day, you will read e^1 at the beginning, and later f^1 .

Nothing lasts longer than a type-o! Until the Urtext emerges. We have the courage to print the f^1 . Of course this is commented and documented in my **Critical Commentary** as are numerous other items. Of course I would be interested to know what the readers of this interview think about this. Philologically the facts, I believe, are clear. But even from the musical viewpoint, isn't f^1 much more convincing than the e^1 that, for a short moment, in the second to last accord, introduces an "off" harmony (a-minor accord). Other similar passages, such as, right from the start, the upbeat to measure 1 with the repeated f^1 , markedly differ from the passage in question.

QUESTION: Our readers can contact us via the Schumann Forum 2010 by writing an e-mail. Perhaps a discussion of the topic could evolve. Mitsuko Uchida, with whom you have also talked at length about this passage, cannot get used to f^1 at the beginning of the movement. She continues to play e^1 , for now.

JOST: Of course I have listened to numerous recordings of the concerto. I believe no one plays f^1 here, which in my opinion would be correct. But how could they? All the so far existing editions have e^1 , and it doesn't sound completely wrong. It's manually even somewhat easier.

QUESTION: Did Schumann ever write his own piano reduction of the orchestra part, like for instance Brahms did for his violin concerto?

JOST: No, regrettably he did not. Even though it was regarded, at the time, the composer's task to either write the piano reduction himself, or entrust a colleague. For this reason the Henle piano reduction will be of special value for practicing musicians. Here, for the first time, the orchestra instruments will be included in the piano voice. That is very helpful for the sound imagination of the "orchestra musician" at the piano. By the way, there are many cue notes in the solo voice of the first edition (1846) that enabled the conductor – before the score was published – to lead the orchestra from the solo voice.

QUESTION: We will soon be talking to Johannes Umbreit, the author of the piano reduction. It will be posted here on the Schumann Forum 2010 in mid February.



One last personal question: Since you spent so much time on the musical notation of Schumann's Piano Concerto, does the piece lose its appeal? Can you still enjoy Schumann?

JOST: Absolutely. I have "known" this piece since early adolescence, and I love it with a passion. Now, having had through my occupation for Henle, the opportunity to work so intensely on it, I have come to know this music even better. Here and there I have tried things out on the piano (of course I cannot "play" the concerto). But diving into the autograph and the early prints of Schumann's Piano Concerto has brought the music much closer. I would be happy if other readers and users of my edition have the same experience.

G. HENLE VERLAG: Dr. Jost, thank you very much for your time.

Robert Schumann: Piano Concerto op. 54 · Urtext Edition

Henle (solo instrument and piano reduction) HN 660 · Breitkopf & Härtel (score and orchestra material) EB 10660