

IGINO VACCARI

Robert Schumann The Piano Works

IGINO VACCARI
PIANO TUITION

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Foreword

A young man born around 1810 who wanted to pursue a career as a composer would have found himself in his twenties, around 1830 or so, in a very strange position.

Historical position, I mean.

Strange because the major composers of previous generations quickly disappeared one behind the other. In 1826 Weber, in 1827 Beethoven, in 1828 Schubert. And Rossini, after having triumphed in 1829 with Guillaume Tell, retired to private life. Clementi disappeared in 1832, at the age of eighty, and this was in the order of things. According to the order of things, however, Weber should have remained on the scene until around 1860, Beethoven until around 1840 and Schubert until around 1870...

History, grim history, did not allow young shoots to mature in the shadow of the great, but it exposed them to the burning ardors of the sun when they were still in bud: they had to demonstrate that music could remain, thanks to them, at the highest levels of the Art.

Those who were a few years older, like Berlioz in France and Bellini in Italy, and those who had just finished sucking milk, like Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, Liszt entered the scene as protagonists.

Schumann, compared to all the others, however, had a serious handicap.

All the others had trained as musicians in the Conservatory or privately, and when the terrible history called them to appeal they were already professionals.

Schumann, the son of a bookseller-publisher-polygraph, had done his good high school practicing music for pleasure, and at eighteen he enrolled in the law faculty of the University of Leipzig.

At the age of twenty, in July 1830, he wrote to his mother asking her permission to devote himself to music.

He obtained it, and at the end of the year he began the professional study of the piano.

Then he also began to study composition.

He hadn't waited to study, to compose music: Lieder, piano pieces, a quartet with piano had already come out of his pen.

But Schumann, precisely because he started late, was eager to forge ahead.

Thus, between November 1832 and February 1833 he composed the first three movements of a Symphony in G minor and sketched the fourth. He managed to get the first movement accepted by the Gewandhaus, where concerts were regularly held: the performance was not successful.

Also in 1832, and always to forge ahead, Schumann underwent a senseless piano training with an apparatus of his own invention that caused him a finger injury, an injury such as to jeopardize the career of the virtuoso.

We have very good reasons to suspect that the injury was not that serious, that it was psychosomatic and that Schumann was using it as a pretext to justify his failure to study the piano.

But the fact is that the piano career was now precluded.

In 1833, at the age of twenty-three, Schumann was a musical genius but not a professional composer, he was not and could not have become a professional pianist, he did not know how to direct the orchestra, instruct a choir, prepare singers.

He had a small income that came from his father, who died prematurely, and he could return to his hometown and work in the family business that was run by his brothers. And this would have been a disaster, a total disaster, the destruction of all ambitions.

Schumann found the solution of the terrible puzzle by resorting to what he had and that the others did not have, the literary education received in a German high school of the past: in 1834 he founded a music magazine with three friends, and in a short time, from a simple partner who was at the beginning, he became the sole owner, as well as director and chief editor. The magazine was very successful. So Schumann, in the end, had a profession: music critic.

And that wasn't enough.

He had long since left his piano and composing teachers, but he hadn't neglected to compose. He studied composition by himself, composing for piano so that he could immediately have an idea of how his music sounded. His self-education was completed in 1842.

After practicing the piano alone until 1839, he had felt, in 1840, to tackle the Lied, then chamber music and symphonic music.

One could be a great composer even with the piano alone, and Chopin was living proof of this.

But Schumann wanted to prove to himself, even before others, that he was a complete creator, not just a great one.

And he proved it.

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