

Often remembered as one of the most important composers of the Romantic Period, Robert Schumann's body of work is frequently cited as a fine example of this era. Of his many piano works, the piece *Fantasia in C* is a particularly relevant example of music which exudes many early Romantic period qualities. This discussion will attempt to examine these various attributes and illustrate how they shape *Fantasia in C* to be a pivotal work of the Romantic period in which Schumann lived.

The first item one might note about this particular piece is that its inspiration appeared to be very much Romantic in nature, with the first movement (originally titled *Ruines*) written in 1836 during Schumann's agonizing separation from his lover and future wife Clara Wieck. This movement is perhaps the most interesting and possibly the best example of *Fantasia in C*'s three movements to depict the Romantic values that Rowell speaks of in the seventh chapter of his book *Thinking About Music*. In a letter Schumann wrote to Clara in 1836, he described the first movement as not only a "deep lament" for her (1), but also probably the most passionate work he had ever written (2), illustrating the values of *emotion* and *the inner* which Rowell spoke of to be deeply embedded within this work. It might be noted, however, that in Schumann's diary, he claimed that *Fantasia in C* was the *Beethoven Sonata*, with an additional two movements originally titled *Trophies* and *Palms*, making it unclear what the exact inspiration behind this piece as a whole was.³ This causes it to also reside within the value of *The ambiguous* with a potential double meaning for the piece, along with the curious edits and revisions sketched upon the manuscript.⁴ Though it is debated, some scholars believe the first movement to be inspired by Clara, while the second and third were inspired as a tribute to Beethoven.⁵ Interestingly, the work as a whole would ultimately

be dedicated to Franz Liszt upon publication.

One might first notice that the score is actually prefaced with a quotation from Friedrich Schlegel which says:

Durch alle Töne tönet

Im bunten Erdentraum

Ein leiser Ton gezogen

Für den, der heimlich lauschet

Translated to English:

Resounding through all the notes

In the earth's colorful dream

There sounds a faint long-drawn note

For the one who listens in secret

This immediately sets a type of transcendental tone to the piece which very much embodies ideals of Romantic expression. Upon listening, the first movement appears to be both elusive and ambiguous in nature. It seems to not only express the pain of Schumann's emotional state during his separation, but it also does so in an introspective fashion of anticlimactic progression, also very much fitting within the value of *The inner* previously mentioned. Its highly individualistic compositional style and personalized tributes also make it a strong candidate to fit Rowell's description of *The unique*. It has a rather interesting structure, beginning with intense tension through a lack of tonal clarity which ultimately eases throughout the movement, expressing a somewhat unorthodox structure quite foreign to that of the Classical period which typically would have begun from repose toward tension, to return again to repose. With this said, it could easily

be related to Rowell's description of *The disordered*. The use of *color* is also quite evident in this movement, especially during the chromatic treatment of the passage in measure 105. The use of chromatic harmony also stands out to add a definite sense of Romantic *color* to this piece.

One might also ascribe *The continuous* to this first movement due to the fact that the tonal clarity mentioned earlier appears to only come into practice a mere eleven measures before the completion of the first movement. By starting on the dominant of a rhapsodic C major chord with the harmonic structure residing upon, it produces a sense of instability, alternating between a major and minor keys with only brief periods of modulation. The following section headed *Im Legendenton* follows a similar structural pattern beginning upon the dominant of a C minor chord, with the recapitulation being the dominant of E-flat major. This progression gives a definite sense of the restless motion that Rowell coupled with *The continuous*. This effect is also augmented through its thematic fragments of Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* which only become orderly as the movement concludes.

While much of the emphasis of this discussion has so far been placed upon the first movement, it is still important to examine the second and third movements which play a definite importance to this work. While Schumann described them in his letter to Clara as weaker than the first, they still compliment this piece in terms of both contrast and theme. With this stated, the second movement brings back some of the emotional elements of the first movement, but is much more grand in stature, being comprised of an A B A scherzo march which sounds somewhat militaristic; embodying the value of *The intense* once again through its coda's technically demanding skips in reverse directions.

It also employs *The ambiguous* with its elusive rhythm which almost causes the meter to seem to blur from measure to measure at times upon listening.

The final movement creates a fascinating conclusion to this piece with its deeply introspective, dream-like execution. Through its use of arpeggiated notes in C major and concluding sequenced in a slowed sense of unity and resolution rather than triumph, Schumann creates the ultimate early Romantic completion to *Fantasie in C*, embodying not only *emotion, color*, and *The inner*, but also *The Primitive* by expressing a conclusion in much more simpler means.

In addition to the various descriptives applied thus far, *Fantasie in C* may also be connected to a number of the perceptions and values that Rowell mentions in the ninth chapter of his book. In relation to *Tonal values, Chord use*, and the implementation of *Harmonic color* are very important in this piece through the intense chromaticism, and arpeggios mentioned previously. Schumann's use of harmonic instability and delayed resolution, along with the contrast of major and minor keys are a large part of what makes this piece so special. This work also makes brilliant use of certain *Textural values* that Rowell describes such as *Simple/complex* and *Smooth/rough* though the contrasting movements, the first two expressing intense complexity, and the last opting for an anticlimactic conclusion through simplicity. *Fantasie in C* also employs clever *Figuration* through the use its arpeggiated chords and the fragmented thematic elements of *An die ferne Geliebte*.

This piece displays a number of *Dynamic values* such as the implementation of an anticlimax during the first movement, which also embodies the obvious *Expressive seme* through Schumann's proclaimed sadness, along with the value of *Tension/release*

through the eventual resolution. The technical complexity also employs a definite sense of *Athleticism*, especially during the second movement's coda, which required pushed limits for pianists of Schumann's time. As for *Temporal values*, this piece does employ a sense of *motion* with some reoccurring thematic elements, but it perhaps makes the best use of *Conflict and deviation*, holding back on cadences and resolutions to make the piece both unpredictable and much more interesting. *Fantasia in C* also exhibits a number of interesting *Structural values* such as a Mosaic type of *Casual Principal* through its contrasting sections, while expressing *Structural functions* with the use of beginnings, approaches, prolongations, developments, reprises through intensity and the fragmented thematic elements. As for the use of *Theme*, one might say that this piece has an underlying progression from "Ruins" to stability, representing the progression of Schumann's life at the time. Tonality is also an important aspect in this piece due to its apparent ambiguity, and instability.

In context, Robert Schumann's *Fantasia in C* is an excellent work of the early Romantic Period, embodying many of the most important innovative qualities of this period. Through the evolving nature of the three movements, Schumann created a piece of not only brilliant complexity, but also one of great emotion and expressiveness, making this work easily a fine example of its period.

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