

# At the Piano

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The series “At the Piano” is intended for all those who have some experience playing the piano and would now like to play easier original works by famous composers. Students, teachers and those returning to the piano will encounter a wealth of well-known works.

## Contents

Each volume in the series is devoted exclusively to one composer. This is because each composer has his own style and thus places his own very personal demands on his piano works – not only from the point of view of technique but also as regards musical interpretation.

## Technique

All of the pieces have been arranged in progressive level of difficulty. They enable you to practise very different pianistic skills, including runs, breaking chords, arpeggios, parallel thirds, trills, playing chords and polyphonic playing. Thus most of the pieces also prepare you for more demanding pieces by the composer in question. We have endeavoured to keep variety in mind when compiling the pieces: slower ones follow faster ones, dances come after studies, variations after sonata movements, etc.

## Urtext

All of the pieces have been edited according to the strictest Urtext principles, as have all Urtext editions by G. Henle Publishers. In short, this means that the musical text is unaltered and presents the composer’s intentions. Additions that are essential – even great composers occasionally make mistakes – have been given in parentheses. And as we do not wish to dispense with the

aid of fingerings, we clearly differentiate between the ones we have added (in normal writing) and those that are original (in italics). Composers in the Baroque, Classical and even Early Romantic periods were extremely sparing with indications regarding articulation, phrasing, dynamics and tempo. This was because in those days they could assume that experienced players already knew how something was to be played. This might not always be immediately clear to musicians today. Nevertheless, in our Urtext editions we deliberately do without “well-intentioned” additions and questionable alterations, as are often to be found in other editions. Those who use our editions are free of such patronisation; they can be sure of the authenticity of the musical text and make the most of the ensuing flexibility for their own stylistically confident interpretation.

## Guide

This cannot, of course, be done without any help at all. The series “At the Piano” provides an introduction to dealing with Urtext editions as well as a first pedagogical guide on how to get to grips with original works of an easy and medium level of difficulty from a technical and musical point of view. To this end, each piece is preceded by some information on practising it, on its history and on understanding the musical text. In so doing we would like to provide players with a foundation upon which they can develop their own approach to the work, their own personal interpretation and above all, enjoy making music. Pianists who are enthusiastic and prepared to put in a little effort – no matter whether young or old, starting to play or returning to the instrument – will then be able to play their Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms or even Liszt with conviction.

# Playing Schumann

 Robert Schumann (1810–56) started his public career as a composer by writing piano works. Admittedly, he did experiment with numerous other genres in his youth: aside from piano works he wrote operatic scenes, symphonies, piano concertos, chamber music and songs. In addition, Schumann trained as a pianist and also gave a number of concerts before an injury to his hand finally brought his career to an end. So it is no coincidence that the first 23 opus numbers that Schumann had published between 1831 and 1839 were without exception works for piano – starting with the *Abegg-Variationen* op.1 and *Papillons* op.2 (see no.17), the *Intermezzi* op.4 (no.8), *Carnaval* op.9 (nos.11 and 12), the *Fantasiestücke* op.12 (nos.13 and 14) and the *Kinderszenen* op.15 (see nos.3, 4 and 7) and the *Nachtstücke* op.23. The *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* op.26 (no.9) and the *Drei Romanzen* op.28 (no.10) are also really part of this series. It is these 25 pieces for piano together with the song cycles op.24 (*Liederkreis*) and op.25 (*Myrthen*) that are considered to make up Schumann’s inspired early works and that established his reputation as one of the leading composers of his time.

After the early piano works and the songs, Schumann turned to other genres, first of all to the symphony, then to chamber music. It was only after almost ten years, in summer and autumn 1848, that he once again started to write works for piano solo: the *Album für die Jugend* (see nos.2 and 6) – an opus that is not to be considered “great art”, but still a work that was so brilliantly conceived that even today it has not lost any of its radiance or significance as a standard work in piano teaching. After that at the turn of 1849/50, he then wrote another piano work, the *Waldszenen* op.82, whose title even shows that it is typical of German Romanticism, for which the forest and forest atmosphere played a significant role in all of the arts (see no.15).

Schumann’s late works are reviewed differently nowadays. Whereas some see changed aesthetic intentions in them, others claim – perhaps influenced by Schumann’s later mental breakdown – a diminishing of his creative powers. Following the *Waldszenen* he only composed a

little for piano solo, mainly only shorter pieces. For his rather more comprehensive collections *Bunte Blätter* op.99 (see no.5) and *Albumblätter* op.124 (see no.1), he turned for the most part to compositions that he had composed at the same time as his early piano works but that had until then remain unpublished.

 In his early piano works, Schumann succeeded almost at the first go in finding a completely new, as he himself called it “poetic” tone. The “Romantic character piece” is basically his invention, even if precursors may be found in Beethoven (*Bagatellen*) and Schubert (*Impromptus* and *Moments musicaux*). Without wishing to throw the traditional forms of the sonata and of the variations to the four winds, it was important to him to create something new and to break with rigid traditions. One of his most remarkable achievements was creating a synthesis in his music between the music of the great Classical composers and that of the new trends that were greatly influenced by Romantic literature. In so doing it was of the utmost importance for him to also support these new ideas on paper. In the periodical that he founded, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, he time and again fought against inflexibility and mediocrity in art and endeavoured to propagate “new music” as represented by Chopin, Liszt, Berlioz and finally Brahms.

Another of Schumann’s “inventions” was giving poetic titles to his pieces, as was the case with some of those in our volume: “*Träumerei*” (Dreaming), “*Nachklänge aus dem Theater*” (Echoes from the Theatre), “*Des Abends*” (In the Evening), “*Von fremdem Ländern und Menschen*” (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples), etc. In view of how these titles are to be understood, a letter written by Schumann of 5 September 1839 to his old teacher Heinrich Dorn is of interest. When writing about the *Kinderszenen*, he said that he could not deny “that I had more than one child in mind when composing. But of course the titles were added later and are really nothing more than subtle hints for the interpretation and comprehension”. An important note which we should still also take to heart today.