



SOMMCD 0134



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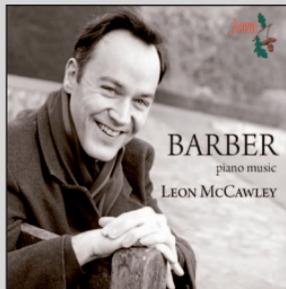
LEON McCAWLEY RECORDINGS

SOMMCD 0103



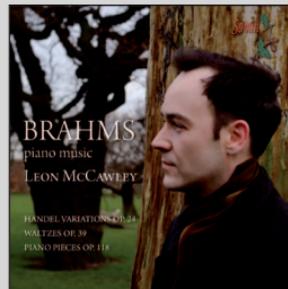
CHOPIN piano music
Ecossoises · Mazurkas
Impromptus · Nocturnes
Fantasy in F minor
'Minute' Waltz

SOMMCD 0108



BARBER piano music
including
Sonata for Piano, op. 26

SOMMCD 0116



BRAHMS piano music
Variations & Fugue on a
Theme by Handel, Op. 24
Waltzes, Op. 39
Klavierstücke, Op. 118

SOMMCD0134 recorded at Champs Hill, Pulborough, West Sussex on 20th & 21st May 2012

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SCHUMANN piano music LEON McCAWLEY



FASCHINGSSCHWANK AUS WIEN
KINDERSZENEN
ÉTUDES SYMPHONIQUES

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810 -1856)

Piano Music

LEON McCAWLEY piano



FASCHINGSSCHWANK AUS WIEN, OP. 26 (21:13)

- | | | |
|---|---------------|------|
| 1 | 1. Allegro | 8:41 |
| 2 | 2. Romanze | 2:45 |
| 3 | 3. Scherzino | 2:05 |
| 4 | 4. Intermezzo | 2:12 |
| 5 | 5. Finale | 5:30 |

KINDERSZENEN, OP. 15 (19:28)

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|------|
| 6 | 1. Von fremden Ländern und Menschen | 1:50 |
| 7 | 2. Kuriose Geschichte | 1:05 |
| 8 | 3. Hasche-Mann | 0:31 |
| 9 | 4. Bittendes Kind | 0:57 |
| 10 | 5. Glückes genug | 1:12 |
| 11 | 6. Wichtige Begebenheit | 0:50 |
| 12 | 7. Träumerei | 2:46 |
| 13 | 8. Am Kamin | 0:53 |
| 14 | 9. Ritter vom Steckenpferd | 0:38 |
| 15 | 10. Fast zu Ernst | 1:52 |
| 16 | 11. Fürchtenmachen | 1:43 |
| 17 | 12. Kind im Einschlummern | 2:28 |
| 18 | 13. Der Dichter spricht | 2:43 |

ÉTUDES SYMPHONIQUES, OP. 13 (33:15)

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|------|
| 19 | Thema | 1:22 |
| 20 | Étude I | 1:16 |
| 21 | Variation III | 1:12 |
| 22 | Étude II | 2:52 |
| 23 | Étude III | 1:25 |
| 24 | Étude IV | 0:53 |
| 25 | Étude V | 1:17 |
| 26 | Variation IV | 2:58 |
| 27 | Étude VI | 0:58 |
| 28 | Étude VII | 1:15 |
| 29 | Variation II | 2:13 |
| 30 | Variation V | 2:23 |
| 31 | Étude VIII | 1:42 |
| 32 | Étude IX | 0:41 |
| 33 | Variation I | 1:29 |
| 34 | Étude X | 1:17 |
| 35 | Étude XI | 1:54 |
| 36 | Étude XII - Finale | 6:11 |

Total Duration: 74:27

SCHUMANN PIANO MUSIC

Robert Schumann was not a performing virtuoso like (for example) Chopin or Liszt – though that had been his original intention before he was baulked by self-inflicted injury to his hands. Instead, the wealth of solo piano music that he composed in the mid to late 1830s marked his emergence as a great composer while practically redefining the possibilities of the genre.

One of the most significant works of this period, the *Études Symphoniques*, op. 13 had such a complicated genesis that it is little short of amazing the work emerged as one of his most important and characteristic piano compositions. It also owes its thematic basis to an otherwise utterly negligible figure: Baron von Fricken. Flautist, amateur composer and father of Ernestine von Fricken – with whom Schumann was briefly in love in 1834 and even intended marrying – the Baron sought the young man's opinion on a set of variations he had composed for the flute. Schumann was not favourably impressed, but he glimpsed such virtue in Fricken's theme that he refined it into an essentialized version, with his own harmonies, and began composing variations on it himself. The work was interrupted when Schumann fell in love with Clara Wieck, the brilliant daughter of his piano teacher Friedrich Wieck, and extricated himself from his relations with the von Frickens. In 1836, however, he took the project up again. He retained only two of the 15 variations he had sketched so far, plus some fragments. Radically rethought as a work in 12 movements with an extended finale, the result was printed in 1837. Schumann originally thought of calling it 'Studies of Orchestral Character', but this first edition, dedicated to the young English composer William Sterndale Bennett, carried the title *Études Symphoniques*. Indeed the finale, which caused Schumann much trouble, was based not on von Fricken's theme (though that is recalled in its course) but on a tune from Marschner's then immensely popular opera *Der Templer und die Jüdin* (The Templar and the Jewess), distantly based on Sir Walter

Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* – the Air 'Du stolzes England freue dich' (Proud England, rejoice!). Sung in the opera as a tribute to Richard the Lionheart, Schumann surely includes it here as a tribute to Sterndale Bennett.

Bennett performed the *Études Symphoniques* widely and was thereby instrumental in broadening Schumann's international reputation, but Schumann himself, in his declining years, came to feel the work was really only suitable for private study. Perhaps in pursuit of this idea in 1852 he brought out a revised version entitled *Études en forme de variations* in which, as well as shortening the finale, he omitted the original third and ninth movements and renumbered the others, as 'Variations', whereas the 1837 edition designates all the movements 'Études'. After the composer's death his father-in-law Friedrich Wieck published a third edition (using both titles, 'Études' and 'Variations') which retained the improved finale but reinstated the two movements Schumann dropped, in their original positions. In Volume VII of Clara Schumann's complete edition of her husband's works, both the 1837 edition and the shortened 1852 versions were restored to circulation. (None of the editions mentions von Fricken's name, and only in the 1837 edition was it made clear that the Theme is not in fact wholly Schumann's, with the coy and slightly dismissive footnote that *Les notes de la mélodie sont de la Composition d'un Amateur*.) Although Clara is named as Editor in the complete edition, the editorial work on the 1852 version was in fact done at her request by Brahms; and Brahms also published the five most polished of the variations that Schumann had composed in 1834 but had cut out of the work in 1836. Schumann had never given them tempo indications or expression-marks, which Brahms therefore supplied. These variations are now often, though by no means always, played as an integral part of the *Études Symphoniques*, but in positions within the cycle that vary somewhat at the choice of the performer. (Leon McCawley has explained the thinking behind his personal ordering of the movements elsewhere in this booklet.) As a result, in a wholly complete performance (for pianists have tended to favour the original

edition of 1837) there are now twelve *études* plus the five so-called 'posthumous' variations (never designated *études*).

Whatever their designations, all the movements are in essence variations which also explore a range of technical problems; but their treatment of the theme is often notably free, altering its proportions and indeed its harmonic structure to engender increasingly exploratory developments, creating a succession of miniature Romantic tone-poems. It was probably this aspect which he thought of as 'symphonic': though some years later, Brahms characterised Schumann's idiosyncratic variation-technique as 'fantasy-variation' to differentiate it from the classical art (and indeed in general from his own).

Schumann introduces the Theme in C sharp minor, which remains the principal key: it has a somewhat tragic aspect, and struck him as having the character of a funeral march. Its potential in that direction is thoroughly explored in the first *étude*. The second *étude* is a nocturne, while the third is a study in energetic staccato writing. The fourth, based on the opening bar of von Fricken's theme, is a canon at the octave, and imitative writing continues in the fifth *étude*, which is also a study in typical Schumannesque dotted rhythms and makes the first of a number of (only temporary) moves to E major, the relative major of C sharp minor. Syncopation is the principal focus of the sixth *étude*, while the seventh is a real virtuoso piece requiring rapid finger-work and the eighth is remarkable for the intricate nature of its decoration. *Étude IX*, marked *presto possibile*, is a whirlwind scherzo and one of the most challenging pieces in the work. The tenth *étude* is a witty essay, but the eleventh – the only one to depart wholly from C sharp minor – is a deeply elegiac study in G sharp minor, the right hand with two voices in duet over a somberly murmuring left-hand pattern. The finale, *Étude XII*, then changes C sharp to its brighter enharmonic form of D flat, and in fact into optimistic D flat major. As mentioned, this is actually based on the Marschner theme, which certainly makes an effective foil to the von Fricken theme (which appears

as a counter-subject) with its virile dotted rhythms, immediately evoking the words '*Du stolzes England freue dich*', and its and *Allegro brillante* mood.

Of the five posthumously-published variations, in the order that Leon McCawley plays them, the third engages in wide melodic leaps while the fourth – an unusually extended piece – is a curious waltz in which the traditional left-hand waltz pattern is turned around so the last note of the bar is the lowest. The second involves hand-crossing and arpeggiated chords, while the fifth is another study in syncopation, this time exploiting the higher reaches of the keyboard. The first – and, in this order, last – of these original variations presents the theme in the left hand beneath quicksilver right-hand figuration.

1834, the year that the *Études Symphoniques* started to come into being, was also the year when Schumann and some of his colleagues founded the *Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Leipzig Journal for Music), as a forum in which to publish essays, musical compositions, letters, reviews, and other artistic items intended to celebrate and promulgate the best in art. Five years later (1839), during a business trip to Vienna on behalf of the journal, and to explore whether he could profitably move his sphere of operations to the Austrian capital, Schumann composed the first four movements of *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, **op. 26**, completing the work on his (empty-handed) return to Leipzig. It was intended for Clara Wieck, who the following year would become Clara Schumann, who was to give a series of concerts in Paris. She had asked for something 'brilliant and easy to understand ... a complete and coherent piece without special titles, not too long and not too short'. She got her wish, yet – typically – the work contains some hidden jokes and allusion.

Fasching is the (sometimes riotous) Roman Catholic Shrovetide carnival, celebrated since medieval times in German-speaking countries. But what is a *Faschingsschwank*?

The word clearly means a Carnival Jest or Jape, but it is Schumann's own coinage, not something he found in a dictionary. The Schumann scholar Eric Sams noted that within the word are nestled the letters ASCH – SCHA, the 'Lettres dansant' (musically translatable into the notes A-E flat-C-B, Eflat-C-B-A) which inhabit one movement of Schumann's other 'carnival' piece, *Carnival* op. 9 (and that work, too, was originally going to be entitled *Fasching: Schwänke auf vier Noten*). In op. 26, too, Schumann makes use of that order of notes as one source of melodic material.

In general outline, the five-movement *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* is something between a suite and a sonata (in B flat, with two of the inner movements in the related keys of G minor and E flat minor), and it contains stylistic allusions to both Beethoven and Schubert. Schumann himself seems to have been uncertain in which category to place the work, describing it on one occasion as 'a great romantic sonata' and on another a 'Schaustück' (showpiece). The *Allegro* first movement is the largest and the most discursive; it has something of the character of a dance suite, alternating a principal idea in 3/4 time with no less than six contrasting episodes. One of these quotes *La Marseillaise*, as a sort of greeting to Clara's Paris audiences. It is typical of Schumann's humour in this work that he turns the famous march-tune into a waltz, and that he should be quoting it at all: in Vienna it had been banned as subversive by Metternich's government, while in France it had been demoted from its position as national anthem since the restoration of the Bourbons and was still regarded as a symbol of revolution. It is followed by a brief, melancholy *Romanze* in G minor that alludes wistfully to one of Clara Wieck's own pieces: an invocation of the distant beloved. The central movement is a sportive, rollicking little Scherzino – that is, a scherzo without a trio section – in a bouncing, syncopated rhythm. After it comes an anxious and passionate Intermezzo, almost paradoxically marked *Mit Größter Energie* (with great energy). This probably refers to the rapid stream of accompanying notes, while the surging, song-like main melody is altogether more sustained: the whole

piece is like a song without words. The work ends with a substantial finale in sonata form marked *Höchst Lebhaft* – a pianistic *tour-de-force* that brings the proceedings to a triumphant and virtuosic close.

A year before this waywardly imaginative work, Schumann had produced one of his most precisely focussed and yet most charming imaginative creations. *Kinderszenen*, op. 15 was one of the projects he worked on during the spring of 1838, when he and Clara were being forcibly kept apart by Clara's father, Schumann's former teacher Friedrich Wieck. 'Whether it was an echo' Schumann wrote to Clara in March, 'of what you said to me once, "that sometimes I seemed to you like a child", anyhow I suddenly got an inspiration and knocked off about thirty quaint little things, from which I selected [thirteen] and entitled them *Kinderszenen*. You will enjoy them, though you will need to forget you are a virtuoso when you play them.... Well, they all explain themselves, and what's more are as easy as possible'. Though several of the resulting set of pieces, some of them less than a minute in duration, are apparently very simple to play, these 'Scenes from Childhood' are not pieces *for* children but poetic evocations of the child's world, from a nostalgic adult perspective. They are like piercing moments of vision, recollected in tranquillity.

Schumann claimed that he actually added the titles after the pieces were composed. No. 1, 'Von fremden Ländern und Menschen' (Of Foreign Lands and People), opens with a theme whose basic elements appear in various guises throughout many of the other pieces, and thus becomes a general unifying element. There are many delicate musical touches – for example No. 4, 'Bittendes Kind' (Pleading Child) is harmonically resolved only when an unseen force (a parent?) gives in and grant the child's wish at the beginning of No. 5, 'Glückes genug' (Completely Happy), and an excursion into the remote key of G sharp minor (the cycle as a whole is centred on G major) intensifies the atmosphere of 'Fast zu ernst' (Almost too serious'). The seventh piece, 'Träumerei'

(Reverie), is by far the most famous piece in the set, and one of the most famous in Schumann's entire output; its disarming yet aspiring melody and innate tranquillity have made it a favourite encore of generations of pianists. Abrupt changes of tempo and unexpected *sforzandos* underline the spookiness of 'Fürchtemmachen' (Frightening). In the final piece, 'Der Dichter spricht' (The Poet Speaks), Schumann seems to distance himself from the indulgent reverie to give a narrator's overview of the proceedings. But of course the distancing effect is not as objective as this might suggest; the truth is that, in Schumann, the poet always speaks.

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Why Schumann decided to reject the five variations that were later to be published posthumously by Brahms in 1873, we will never know exactly. His 1852 revised version is certainly a more streamlined and focused vision. However, without the inclusion of the variations, I always feel that there is a certain magic missing, a lost *innigkeit*. It was Cortot in the late 1920s that chose to intersperse these five gems into the movements both in his concerts and recordings of the set and for many pianists since it has become the accepted norm to do this. Most pianists would agree that they perhaps feature some of the most beautiful, dreamy, creative and imaginative music of the set. My decision to place them in this particular order is both instinctive and structural; for me they are the missing jigsaw pieces that fit into this Schumannesque puzzle by either providing a welcome contrast to the power and virtuosity of some of the Études or where appropriate adding more energy into the mix. Certain Variations act as a preparation to a particular Étude e.g. Variation 3 leads to Étude 2 and also by placing Variation 1 before Étude 10 one can hear a more extended and stronger development building to the triumphant finale.

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LEON MCCAWLEY

English pianist **Leon McCawley** leapt into prominence when he won both First Prize in the International Beethoven Piano Competition in Vienna and Second Prize in the Leeds International Piano Competition at the age of nineteen in 1993.

Since then, McCawley has given highly acclaimed recitals that include London's Wigmore Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, Berlin Konzerthaus, Lincoln Center New York, Prague Rudolfinum and Vienna Musikverein. McCawley performs frequently with many of the top British orchestras and has performed several times at the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall. He broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 in recital and with many of the BBC orchestras. Further afield he has performed with Cincinnati Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and Vienna Symphony among many others. Conductors he has worked with include Daniele Gatti, Paavo Järvi, Kurt Masur and Simon Rattle.

McCawley's wide-ranging discography has received many accolades including two "Editor's Choice" awards in *Gramophone* and a *Diapason d'Or* for his boxed set of The Complete Mozart Piano Sonatas and more recently, a *Gramophone Critic's Choice 2011* for his recording of Barber Piano Music for SOMM.

McCawley studied at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester with Heather Slade-Lipkin and at the Curtis Institute of Music with Eleanor Sokoloff. He also worked with Nina Milkina in London.

Leon McCawley is a professor of piano at London's Royal College of Music and is married to the painter, Anna Hyunsook Paik.

For more information, please visit www.leonmccawley.com

CHOPIN PIANO MUSIC SOMMCD 0103

Textures are translucent and pliant. Above all, McCawley always maintains focus on the life of a phrase, which lends his playing that natural cantabile one expects from the finest singers. Add to this the sway and lilt of an infallible tempo rubato, so natural as to seem inextricable from every gesture of the pleasure this disc affords. Warmly recommended.

Patrick Rucker INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW

Here is one the most beautiful performances of Chopin's piano music I have encountered. It is absolutely perfect. If you don't want a blockbuster set, like Murray Perahia's five-CD compilation on Sony, or the new series under way on Chandos with the spectacular Louis Lortie, which will be a completist's nirvana, then look seriously at this. Wonderful collection – seek out.

THE GLASGOW SUNDAY HERALD

BARBER – THE SOLO PIANO MUSIC SOMMCD 0108

GRAMOPHONE Critic's Choice 2011

Leon McCawley's reading of Barber's solo piano works is a superb collection, admirably and intelligently delivered. McCawley delivers everything magnificently. This is now the CD to get of Barber's piano music.

Peter Dickinson GRAMOPHONE

It is impossible to think of a more sympathetic pianist than Leon McCawley. The Sonata is Barber's masterpiece, and McCawley is brilliant, giving it a committed performance, especially in the torrential fugue.

Marius Dawn PIANIST MAGAZINE

This is an excellent collection of Barber's piano music. It is performed with devotion and technical brilliance while remaining emotionally faithful. This disc shows different

facets of Barber's legacy and depicts him in a portrait that is both personal and very humane.

Oleg Ledeniov MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL

McCawley dispatches this [Barber's Sonata Op. 26] with phenomenal clarity and accuracy and a powerful sense of line, attributes that he demonstrates in the second of the Interludes. He is no less impressive in the light-hearted numbers, the Souvenirs and the Excursions, or in the poetic and nostalgic works such as the Nocturne Op. 33, or the late Ballade, Op. 46.

With the inclusion of a further 15 minutes of Barber's piano works McCawley's must now be the survey of choice, and the Somm engineers have perfectly captured all the clarity and warmth of tone that McCawley conjures from his Steinway.

Nicholas Salwey INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW

BRAHMS PIANO MUSIC SOMMCD 0116

When all is said and done, it is difficult to know whether McCawley's refined piano playing, his natural yet cultivated musicality or his boundless imagination warrants the greater praise. You must hear the recording, but be warned: you may never want to hear another pianist play Op. 118.

“Outstanding” Patrick Rucker INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW

The Op. 39 Waltzes are next and he really is on their wavelength, delighting in subtle shifts of character, played with elegance and affection. The Op. 118 pieces are superbly rendered from the the Lisztian bravura of the 1st through all the passion, darkness and soul searching to the the desolate ending of the 6th. The Somm recording...is perfectly in tune with the clarity and precision of McCawley's playing. A fine Brahms recital.

Andrew McGregor BBC RADIO 3 CD REVIEW