

Märchenerzählungen, Op. 132 (1853)

Robert Schumann

Composed in October of 1853—just weeks before his final breakdown—Robert Schumann’s *Märchenerzählungen* (*Fairy Tales*) is an eloquent disclaimer to the allegation that his later works suffered from his mental condition. This enchanting four-movement work is captivating with its beautiful flowing melodies and rhythmic vitality—obviously the product of a brilliant and orderly mind. The charming and effervescent opening movement is followed by a well-organized, driving German march. Next, a sublime duet between clarinet and violin is enveloped by a tender sixteenth-note accompaniment in the piano. The vigorous and rousing concluding movement is a straight-forward expression of hope and optimism. Originally for viola, clarinet, and piano, this instrumentation is found in the publication by Cundy-Bettoney.

The *Märchenerzählungen*, like the *Phantasiestück* (*Fantasy Pieces*) of 1842 and *Märchenbilder* (*Fairytale Pictures*) of 1851, belong to an outpouring of fantasy-like instrumental miniatures. Perhaps uncertain of how to categorize his free-spirited flight of musical fancy, Schumann used a variety of names to describe them. Early on he referred to the *Märchenerzählungen* by the generic term *Romances*, suggesting that the four pieces had no specific program, literary or otherwise. He later described them to his publisher as “predominantly cheery pieces, written with a light heart,” despite the onset of the illness that would prompt him to beg to be committed to an asylum several months later. Clara Schumann was particularly enthusiastic about her husband’s unusual choice of instruments. “He feels that this combination will have a very Romantic effect,” she wrote in her diary. “I feel the same myself. What an inexhaustible genius!”

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was a German composer and influential music critic. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Romantic era.