

## **Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120**

Robert Schumann

B. June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Germany

D. July 29, 1856, Endenich, Germany

*Initially composed in 1841 as Symphony No. 2; was revised in 1851. Published in 1853.*

*First version premiered December 6, 1841 in Leipzig, conducted by F. David. Revised version premiered 30 December 1852 in Düsseldorf, conducted by the composer.*

*Approximately 30 Minutes.*

*Scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani and strings (approx. 29 minutes).*

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory became the foundation for a branch of 20<sup>th</sup> Century literary criticism. Very quickly, however, it became clear that one particular critical strategy - that of utilizing the work of art to psychoanalyze the artist - was problematic and untenable. This pair of works by Mozart and Schumann could serve as a case-study against that approach. Whereas the light and charming Divertimento was composed during a troubling and unstable period of Mozart's life, the brooding, weighty Symphony No. 4 by Schumann was composed during much happier times.

Schumann began work on the symphony in 1841, during a period of great productivity. The previous year, Schumann had won a decisive legal victory against Clara Wieck's father, who had refused to grant the couple permission to marry. That year has been referred to as "The Symphonic Year" by musicologist John Daverio, to parallel the *Liederjahr*, or song-year, which refers to the composer's copious composition of songs during that year, and virtually that year alone. Whereas Schumann had achieved success with his first symphony, written earlier that year, this work was received very coolly. The composer withdrew the work and shelved it for ten years.

When Schumann revisited the work, it was as the municipal music director of Düsseldorf, which he began in September 1850. This was another triumphant period of his life, as he had secured a prestigious position with a steady salary. In addition, his duties as director and conductor of the city's orchestra and chorus provided him a measure of freedom to perform pieces of his own choosing. Two weeks before Robert began work on the revision, Clara gave birth to a daughter, Eugenie.

Although the revised version of the symphony is the one which is usually performed, it is not unanimously considered to be "better." While there were a number of structural improvements, the orchestration was changed, giving it a Romantic weight that the earlier version did not have. Brahms, in fact, preferred the 1841 version of the symphony, and after the composer's death, arranged for its publication by Breitkopf and Härtel in 1891.

Of primary interest in this symphony is Schumann's attempt to create a cyclical work. In fact, the only real precedent for the structural organization of the work is Mendelssohn's *Scottish Symphony*. The introduction to the first movement states the raw

musical materials which will be explored throughout the symphony. In addition, there are no breaks between movements. Instead, musical continuity pervades. Temporally, there is nothing more than a quarter rest with a fermata separating the first three movements. However, the tonal connections between the movements break down any sense of separation this brief pause might have offered. The D major which closes the first movement is changed to D minor as the second movement opens, and is recontextualized as the subdominant to A minor, which is the key of the second movement (this harmonic move is the same one made by Mozart in the first movement of the Divertimento). Similarly, the second movement ends with an A major chord, which is then reinterpreted as the dominant of the third movement, which is in D minor. There is even less distinction when the slow coda of the third movement blends imperceptibly with the slow introduction of the fourth movement. By the time the musical texture has audibly changed, the movement is well under way. The introduction gives way to a lively D major sonata-allegro movement, which finally releases the weight of the previous three movements.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Schumann's Symphony No. 4 on April 2-4, 2004, with Lawrence Foster conducting.

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