ROBERT SCHUMANN: LITERARY INSPIRATION AND PEDAGOGICAL PREPARATION FOR PAPILLONS

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German composer and music critic Robert Alexander Schumann was one of the most creative, inspired, and eccentric composers of his time. Living during the same time as the famous Polish composer Frédéric François Chopin, it is possible for Schumann to sometimes be overlooked. Schumann’s music is a great asset and tool for the difficult task of teaching character in music. This paper will focus on the work, *Papillons*, Op. 2, a piece written in the early years of Schumann’s career as a composer. Schumann was greatly influenced by romantic literature and more specifically by Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, author of a novel that inspired *Papillons*.

I will discuss specific stylistic similarities between Schumann and Richter that are tied to the work *Papillons*, including the meaning of the title and its possible associations to Jean Paul. This will be follow with more specific literary associations of *Papillons* to the novel *Flegeljahre*, including the texts directly related to each piece, as indicated by Schumann. Finally, I will outline six specific technical challenges within this piece, followed by a list of compositions throughout Schumann’s late elementary and intermediate repertoire that would prepare a student to later perform the early advanced-level *Papillons*.¹

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SCHUMANN AND ROMANTIC LITERATURE

The Birth of a Composer

Born in 1810 in a small town of Saxony called Zwickau (now in the east part of Germany), Schumann grew up in a strained family. His father, a bookseller, had a nervous disorder, and his sister Emilia, who struggled with mental and physical disorders eventually committed suicide. Robert, understandably, was beleaguered his whole life with his own possible mental downfall.² The young Schumann always had the desire to write and study music, but when he was sixteen the death of his father hampered his dream, as his family insisted he pursue a more financially secure career in law. He enrolled in both Leipzig University and Heidelberg University. Since Robert still spent more time at the piano than studying law, his mother gave him a six-month trial period in 1830 to study music with Friedrich Wieck – the father of his future wife, Clara. Studying piano at such a late age, Schumann was impatient to catch up on technique. It was not uncommon in the age of the virtuoso performer for pianists to look to finger-strengthening “devices” for help. Schumann was among them, and ultimately crippled his right hand, forever damaging his performing career.³

A passionate man, he idolized many in his formative years including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. In the German literary world, Schumann also found a hero in romantic writer Jean Paul Richter.\(^4\) Growing up in his father’s bookshop, it is natural that Schumann would become such a lover of the written word, also following the writings of E.T.A. Hoffman, Clemens Brentano, Ludwig Tieck, Goethe, and Shakespeare. Early nineteenth century romantic German writers such as these were interested in stirring the emotions and found a special connection to music. Their fascination with music was drawn by the ability of music to touch the emotions in a way they, as writers, could not obtain without using words. Though Schumann’s literary interests were many, there were none that could measure up to his love for Jean Paul.\(^5\)

His preoccupation with Richter began in 1827, the same year as his discovery of the music of Schubert.\(^6\) In an 1829 letter to Friedrich Wieck, Schumann wrote “Schubert is still my ‘one and only’ love, the more so as he has everything in common with my one and only Jean Paul. To play his compositions is with me like reading one of Jean Paul’s novels...There is no other music which presents so bewildering a psychological problem in its train of ideas, its apparently abrupt transitions...”\(^7\) Schumann reveled in simply meeting people who had known Richter – even traveling in 1828 to Bayreuth in Bavaria, where Richter spent most of his life.\(^8\)

\(^{4}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{7}\) David Whitwell, ed., *Schumann: A Self-Portrait in His Own Words* (Northridge: Winds), 76.
\(^{8}\) Eric Jensen, “Explicating Jean Paul,” 129.
Given Schumann’s fascination with literature and inspiration by the philosophy of the romantic writers, it is not surprising he turned to a career in music. Schumann’s desire to intertwine his two favorite worlds of words and music was so great, that in a letter to his mother in 1830 he stated that “If my talents for poetry and music could only be concentrated into one focus, the rays of light would not be so broken...”9 To his wife, Clara, he went even further, saying that he was

…affected by everything that goes on in the world, and think it all over in my own way, politics, literature, and people, and then I long to express my feelings and find an outlet for them in music. That is why my compositions are sometimes difficult to understand, because they are connected with distant interests; and sometimes striking, because everything extraordinary that happens impresses me, and impels me to express it in music… I can only speak of music in broken sentences, although I think a great deal about it.10

Schumann was able to achieve this marriage through a genre popular with many composers of the time – the character piece or charakterstück. An ideal outlet for Schumann’s hyper-romantic imagination, the character piece became a large part of his first decade (1830-1839) of music study and composition, marking many of his best known and finest solo piano works. These include but are not limited to Papillons, Op. 2; Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6; Carnaval, Op. 9; Fantasiestücke, Op. 12; Kinderszenen, Op. 15; and Kreisleriana, Op. 16.11 Some of these pieces, such as Kinderszenen, can be and are often performed as separate works. More advanced works such as Carnaval, Kreisleriana, and Papillons are suites of individual character pieces intended to be performed as one larger work. Papillons is comprised of an introduction followed by

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10 Ibid., 21-2.
twelve individual pieces ranging in length from six measures (introduction) to ninety measures (No. 12).

**Stylistic Reflections of Jean Paul in Schumann’s Music**

Richter’s writing style is whimsical, humorous, haughty and full of abrupt changes in mood and plot – as was Schumann and his characteristic musical style. Schumann even went so far as to state that he “learned more counterpoint from Jean Paul than from his music teacher” – a statement reflecting the deep influence the novelist had on Schumann’s compositions.

There are four distinctive characteristics common to the music of Schumann and the literature of Jean Paul: an inclination to make brief, pithy statements; the juxtaposition of opposites; the repetition of previous material; and a love of hidden meanings. Jean Paul’s fondness for making short statements is a feature naturally inherent throughout the genre of the individual character piece. In *Papillons*, the Introduction, and Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 last only six, sixteen, twelve, twenty-eight, twenty-six, and twenty-four measures respectively. Not only are these pieces short in length, but the ideas within them can sometimes last only four measures, such as in No. 2 measures 1-4, No. 5 measures 9-12, and No. 10 measures 65-68.

This feature is somewhat related to the second idea, the juxtaposition of opposites – a characteristic inherent in the early German romantic writers who often like to mix the

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sentiments. They might, for example, blend a sacred thought or image with something humorous or grotesque. Many of Schumann’s collections of character pieces, especially *Papillons*, require rapid shifts in mood, texture, tone color, dynamics, tempi, and key, as well as frequent rhythmic surprises through syncopations, misplaced accents, etc.\(^{15}\) Not only do these sudden changes reflect brief ideas, but they also include a mixture of opposites. The best example of this is in *Papillons*, No. 11, clearly the most eclectic piece of the set. This piece opens with a three measure polonaise-like introduction that suddenly turns light-hearted and lyrical in eight-measures marked *piano*. Measure twelve moves into a rhapsodic and somewhat scalar-like passage with seven different dynamic markings within twelve measures. All of this happens within the first page of a three-page piece. Upon the release of *Papillons*, Schumann remarked in his diary that all of the quick changes and diverse colors would keep the listener still thinking about the previous page even when the player had finished the next thought.\(^{16}\) Robert Schauffler states that “each number leaves us wishing that it were longer;”\(^{17}\) and Joan Chissel states that “Schumann took his first steps away from pure notes into the world of ideas.”\(^{18}\)

The third characteristic, repetition of previous material, occurs several times in the set and is discussed more throughout this paper. The last trait exhibited by Jean Paul and seen in *Papillons* is a love of hidden meaning. One way this is exhibited is through use of the title *Papillons*.


The Meaning of the Title *Papillons*

Since it was common practice at the time for composers to use descriptive words of nature as titles of pieces, it is not surprising that the title *Papillons*, or “butterflies,” was given to this work. Schumann, whether intentionally or unintentionally, seemed taken with the idea of the term “papillon” in all his works, referring to his *Abegg Variations* as “Papillons” (with Op. 2 originally titled *Papillons musicals* (sic)); Intermezzi, Op. 4, as “Papillons on a larger scale”; Impromptus, Op. 5, as “a second set of Papillons”; and the use of “Papillons” as the title of one of the pieces in *Carnaval*.\(^{19}\) Though Schumann never gives a clear explanation of the relationship of the title to the work itself, many have conjectured its meaning. The term “metamorphosis” has surfaced as a recurring idea, although three completely different views on the idea have also emerged. The first view is that *Papillons* portrays a historical “metamorphosis” in that “all of the twelve pieces underwent an elaborate metamorphosis, like larvae, before emerging in their full butterfly grace and charm.”\(^{20}\) This statement refers to the fact that the work, published in April of 1832, was a conglomeration of pieces from Schumann’s two-hand waltzes and four-hand polonaises written separately between 1828 and 1831.\(^{21}\) The second idea is more of a symbolic “metamorphosis.” Jean Paul referenced the butterfly in nearly all his works; the association was seen as a metamorphosis of the soul and the realization of a higher ideal. In other words, as the butterfly develops through a process called metamorphosis, so the soul develops until it has attained a purer state of

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\(^{21}\) Ibid.
The third concept is described as a more literal “metamorphosis” or “transformation” of the music. Following the brief introduction, No. 1 (the waltz theme of the ball) uses all possible letters of the musical alphabet: A, B, C-sharp, D, E, F-sharp, and G (see example 1). (This theme is re-introduced in the finale as a countermelody to the Grossvatertanz shown in example 8). A transformation, or rearrangement, of the pitches would then occur through the individual pieces to follow; every letter name is used as a key at some time throughout the piece.

Example 1. Papillons, No. 1, Measures 1-4.

Other ideas include Alan Walker’s contention that by “Papillons,” Schumann meant “motifs that can appear or disappear, fly forward or backward, and assume the infinite variety of shapes and colors.” Walker supports this by referencing the piece in Carnaval entitled “Florestan” (see example 2) – a theme that has the same shape and rhythm as the theme of No. 1 of Papillons (see example 1). Schumann even marked the term “Papillon” with a question mark on the page.

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There are many creative ways in which the term “butterfly” can be applied to this group of pieces and certainly none are less interesting or possible than the next. While the front cover of the original publication included an engraving of butterflies along with the dedication to “Terese, Rosalie et Emilie” (his sisters-in-law) and many of the individual pieces could certainly evoke the image of a butterfly, Schumann spoke of *Papillons* as something else entirely.27

26 Ibid.
LITERARY ASSOCIATIONS OF *Papillons*

*Flegeljahre, the Novel*

Although *Papillons* was developed from earlier works, Schumann left clues as to what he envisioned the works’ literary counterpart to be: the associations to a novel by Jean Paul entitled *Flegeljahre*. In an April 17, 1832 letter to his family, Schumann told them to “read the last scene in Jean Paul’s *Flegeljahre* as soon as possible, because the *Papillons* are intended as a musical representation of that masquerade...”

The title of the novel, translated as *Adolescence* or *Age of Indiscretion*, deals with twin brothers Walt and Vult. The two characters, not surprisingly, are linked to Schumann’s well-known imaginary figures Florestan and Eusebius; Vult, the counterpart of the former, and Walt, the latter. In the novel, Walt is trying to gain an inheritance through the completion of sixteen bizarre stipulations. A third character in the novel is Wina, a girl for whom both brothers are smitten. Although Wina is in love with Walt, none of the three have confessed their love. The final chapter in the novel, entitled “Larventanz” or “Masked Ball,” is the chapter that Schumann connects to *Papillons*. In this masked ball scene, Walt dresses as a “Coachman,” Vult as “Hope,” a shepherdess, and Wina as a “Nun.” While dancing, Wina confesses her love to the man she believes is

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Walt, though it is actually Vult who has disguised his voice to sound like Walt. Devastated, Vult decides to leave, but first gets Walt to exchange disguises with him so he and Wina can be together. As the ball winds down in the wee hours of the morning, Walt is getting sleepy. He vaguely hears a flute playing, although he does not realize that it is his brother Vult playing as he is walking out of town, never to return.\footnote{Eric Jensen, \textit{Schumann}, 91.}

In an April 19, 1832 letter to “L. Rellstab”, Schumann states that he

\begin{quote}
...often turned to the last page for the end seemed like a fresh beginning, and almost unconsciously I found myself at the piano, and thus one Papillon after the other came into existence. I trust you may consider their origin an apology for the whole composition, as the separate numbers often require explaining.\footnote{May Herbert, trans., \textit{Early Letters of Robert Schumann} (St. Clair Shores: Scholarly Press), 161.}
\end{quote}

Schumann admitted that, overall, he had not adapted the music to the text, but rather had connected the text to the music (with the exception of the finale, which was directly inspired by the account of the masked ball).\footnote{Joan Chissel, \textit{Schumann}, 103.} Even if the work was not originally conceived as a direct link to the text, Schumann, through his diary entries and markings in his first copy of the novel, quickly found inspiration in drawing a connection between the two works. Schumann made notes next to specific passages of text in his copy of the novel, assigning text passages to ten of the twelve \textit{Papillons}.\footnote{Eric Jensen, \textit{Schumann}, 91.}
**Flegeljahre Passages Connected to Papillons**

The passages Schumann selected from *Flegeljahre* do not actually cover the entire plot of the masked ball. They do, however, collaborate with the music to achieve two objectives. First, they offer an opportunity for musical contrast. Second, as Schumann described to his family, the text and music reflect the temperaments of the three characters: Vult’s acerbic nature, Walt’s sensitive soul, and Wina’s angelic love. As described earlier, the scene where Wina actually tells of her love for Walt and Vult’s reaction to the disappointment is not included in Schumann’s indicated writings. Schumann was also intent on not sacrificing the music to simply fit the plot. He reordered some of the pieces with associated passages to allow for the more abrupt musical contrasts he so characteristically adhered to. After linking passages to Nos. 1-5, he proceeds in the following order: No. 8, No. 7, No. 9, No. 6, No. 10.35 This discussion, however, will continue on in the performance order of the musical score.

The short Introduction in D major, though not linked to a specific text, is marked moderato, and could be seen as the opening of the ball. The next piece, No. 1, also written in D major, presents the famous theme discussed in example 1 – the sixteen-measure waltz theme that returns at the end of *Papillons* as a countermelody to the *Grossvatertanz* in the winding-down of the ball (see example 7). The text Schumann associated with this passage refers to Walt, the corresponding character to Schumann’s dreamy character, Eusebius. The passage is about Walt’s delight as he enters the ball and thus the waltz, marked “dolce,” seems to be a clear reflection of Walt’s temperament.

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As he [Walt] came out of the little room, he asked God that he might happily find it again; he felt like a hero, thirsting for fame, who goes forth to his first battle...36

A capricious movement is No. 2, with its exploding prestissimo E-flat major arpeggio marking Walt’s entry into the ball room, followed by its abrupt jump into a hesitant A-flat major scherzo. The scherzo, with swift and light broken tenths in the left hand, could be portraying either Walt’s confusion for entering the wrong room or the excited “zigzag figures” mentioned in the text below.37

Characteristically taking a wrong turn he first entered the punch-room, which he took for the dance-hall... Wina was not to be seen, nor any sign of Vult... At last, wishing to examine the anterooms, he reached the real resounding, burning hall full of excited figures... an aurora-borealis sky full of crossing, zigzag figures...38

The 28-measure F-sharp minor march of No. 3 is a wonderful attempt to depict a giant boot, with its weighty octaves and ending canon.

What most of all attracted him [Walt] and his astonishment was a giant boot that was sliding around, dressed in itself...39

No. 4, opening with an A major chord and finishing in F-sharp major, is an elfin-like piece requiring subtle dynamic nuances to contrast its delicate, yet at times bold, personality. These strongly-contrasted ideas could have been intended to represent the personalities of Hope (Vult) and the Nun (Wina).

Hope quickly turned herself round, an unmasked shepherdess and a simple nun with a half-mask and a scented bunch of auriculas...40

No. 5 in B-flat major, referenced as the meeting of Walt and Wina, opens with two flowing and serenely balanced bass and soprano voices. The two voices could be

36 Gerald Abraham, Schumann: A Symposium, 37.
37 Carolyn Maxwell, Schumann Solo Piano Literature, 7.
39 Ibid., 38.
40 Ibid.
seen to correspond to Walt and Wina, each serenely standing near each other anticipating what is to come. The tranquility is sharply interrupted by a series of diminished-seventh chords, leading to an unusually intense chromatic passage – perhaps the deepening connection of their souls. The opening theme melody returns more intensely through octave displacement of the right hand.41

Now he [Walt] stood for a second alone by the tranquil maiden [Wina], and the half rose and lily of her face looked out from the half-mask as from the flower-sheath of a drooping bud. Like foreign spirits from two far cosmic nights they looked at each other behind the dark masks, like the stars in a solar eclipse, and each soul saw the other from a great distance.42

It seems that Vult might be very hurt and angry, thus his mockery of his brother’s dancing in No. 6 (D minor) seems an ideal outlet. A somewhat unstable feeling occurs in this movement through the sudden shifts of tempo and character as well as the ambiguous tonality. The clumsy, stumbling sforzandos, and syncopation of the opening are portraying Walt’s awkwardness on his feet. The character is suddenly lightened, however, through clean, moving octaves into a clear F major cadential ending in the first phrase, followed by pianissimo A-major chord inversions moving in a waltz in the second section (see example 3).43 This musical gesture will return in No. 10 at a different pitch level.

Your waltzes up to now – don’t be annoyed – have traversed the room as good mimic imitations, party horizontal – of the coachman [Walt], partly perpendicular – of the miner.44

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41 Carolyn Maxwell, Schumann Solo Piano Literature, 8.
42 Gerald Abraham, Schumann: A Symposium, 38.
43 Carolyn Maxwell, Schumann Solo Piano Literature, 8.
44 Gerald Abraham, Schumann: A Symposium, 38.
Following the erratic nature of No. 6, the simple beauty of the next movement is a strong contrast. Although No. 7 may feel and look as if it should be slow and dreamy, the marked metronome tempo of 58 per dotted-quarter might fit the text as Schumann intended. The simple F minor scalar opening reflects Walt running up the stairs to meet Vult, while the A-flat major B section, with its increasing harmonic rhythm and sequential melody, represents Vult’s insistent plea for his brother to exchange costumes.

He [Vult] threw his mask away and a curious hot desert-aridity or dry fever-heat broke through his gestures and words. ‘If you have ever felt love for your brother,’ he began with dry voice, and took the wreath off and undid the female costume, ‘if the fulfillment of one of his dearest wishes is anything to you, and if it is not indifferent to your joys whether he has the least or the greatest, in short if you will listen to one of his most earnest entreaties…’

A representation of Walt dancing with Wina, No. 8 in C-sharp minor is a stamping dance with similarities to that of a ländler. The enharmonic change to D-flat major may be Schumann’s attempt to convince many that this piece was written by none other than Franz Schubert.

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46 Gerald Abraham, Schumann: A Symposium, 38.
47 Carolyn Maxwell, Schumann Solo Piano Literature, 9.
As a youth touches the hand of a great and celebrated writer: so-like a butterfly’s wing, like auricular-pollen – he lightly touched Wina’s back and withdrew as far as possible in order to look at her life-breathing face. If there is a harvest-dance that is the harvest, if there is a Catherine-wheel of loving rapture: Walt the coachman had both...  

Walt joyfully agreeing to the costume exchange is the opening idea of No. 9 in B-flat minor. He is quickly told by Vult to hurry – his feeling of persistence felt in the change to quick staccato-moving scalar passages in a choral texture in the parallel key of D-flat major (see example 4). The piece ends back in B-flat minor.

[Walt] To that I can only answer you: Joyfully. ‘Then be quick’, replied Vult without thinking.

![Example 4. Papillons, No. 9, Measures 8-12.](image)

The last specific literary reference was for No. 10 in C major (two separate text passages) where Schumann also begins to repeat previously heard material. The opening 24 measures set the scene for the dance that follows in measure 25. Within these 24 measures, the first 16 could be seen as Walt’s lively concern over the costume exchange, especially as the ascending scalar motive of the preceding movement (example 4) returns in a transformed passage of similar style (see example 5). The last 8 measures of the

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introduction (measures 17-24) is Walt’s “dancing theme” from No. 6, returning in G Major (see example 6) – the change of key a subtle reminder that the brothers have changed costumes.

As Walt entered, it seemed to him that everyone noticed his exchange of disguise; some women noticed that Hope now had fair hair behind the flowers instead of before, and Walt’s step was shorter and more feminine, as became Hope. But he soon forgot himself and the hall and everything else as the coachman Vult without ado placed Wina at the head of the ‘English dance’ and now to her astonishment sketched out a dance with her and, like some painters, at the same time painted with the foot – only with bigger strokes.

Example 5. *Papillons*, No. 10, Measures 9-16.52


The middle section (measures 25-64) is the docile waltz of Vult and Wina – the lovely waltz theme characteristic of Wina’s temperament, which is interrupted by lively and isolated thematic material in measures 65-68, a characteristic trait of Vult.54

52 Ibid., 10.
53 Ibid.
Towards the very end of the dance, in the hurried hand-reachings, the crossings, the runnings up and down, Vult allowed ever more confused sounds to escape him – only the breath of speech – only stray butterflies blown to sea from a far-off island. To Wina it sounded like a curious lark’s-song on a summer night.\textsuperscript{55}

It is certainly curious that Schumann makes no reference to Nos. 11 and 12 in his copy of \textit{Flegeljahre}. After stating that he fit the text to the music and not vice versa, it would explain why there is a lack of textual connection – Schumann knew Nos. 11 and 12 referred to the events \textit{after} the ball and not during.\textsuperscript{56} Individuals familiar with Schumann’s music will perhaps be able to recognize the polonaise-like No. 11 (D major), as it is based on an early set of polonaise’s for piano duet.\textsuperscript{57} The poetic touch is not lost, since Wina’s native language (Polish) is spoken between her and Vult during their dance. The dramatic changes in register and tonality could be a bold and affirmative statement of Wina’s confessed love for Walt.\textsuperscript{58}

Schumann once again presents previously heard melodies in the D major finale No. 12, but first he opens the piece with a folk tune called the \textit{Grossvatertanz} (see example 7).\textsuperscript{59} Like many composers, Schumann seemed to delight in making references to known tunes, such as many composers making reference to \textit{La Marseillaise} in many works over the centuries. Schumann also uses the \textit{Grossvatertanz} in the finale of \textit{Carnaval}, Op. 9.\textsuperscript{60} Translated as “Grandfather’s Dance,” the \textit{Grossvatertanz} was a well-known seventeenth-century German folk tune often used to signal the closing of night-

\textsuperscript{55} Gerald Abraham, \textit{Schumann: A Symposium}, 38.
\textsuperscript{56} Eric Jensen, “Explicating Jean Paul,” 140.
\textsuperscript{57} Carolyn Maxwell, \textit{Schumann Solo Piano Literature}, 11.
\textsuperscript{58} Eric Jensen, “Explicating Jean Paul,” 141.
\textsuperscript{59} Carolyn Maxwell, \textit{Schumann Solo Piano Literature}, 11.
\textsuperscript{60} Joan Chissell, \textit{Schumann}, 103.
time festivities, and was frequently used at weddings.\textsuperscript{61} The original text \textit{Und als der Grossvater die Grossmutter nahm; Da war der Grossvater ein Bräutigam} \textsuperscript{62} “describes a grandmother and grandfather transformed by dance into a youthful bride and groom – transformed that is, until the arrival of the next day.”\textsuperscript{63} Its use as the opening theme of the finale, supported by horn-fifths, seems appropriate to signify the end of the ball that the brothers are attending.\textsuperscript{64}

Example 7. \textit{Grossvatertanz}.\textsuperscript{65}

We are then reminded of the opening theme from the first \textit{Papillons} as it is presented in counterpoint against the \textit{Grossvatertanz} in the left hand (see the highlighted section of example 8). The opening melody then gradually drops one note per repetition over a pedal D until all we have left is the chiming of the note “A” – the strike of the clock as the ball closes and the dawn rises.\textsuperscript{66} The decaying dynamics and fleeting notes clearly paint a picture of the concluding words of the novel that were marked in Schumann’s first copy at the beginning of the movement.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{63} Eric Jensen, “Explicating Jean Paul,” 141.
\textsuperscript{64} Carolyn Maxwell, \textit{Schumann Solo Piano Literature}, 11.
\textsuperscript{65} Joan Chissell, \textit{Schumann}, 103.
\textsuperscript{66} Carolyn Maxwell, \textit{Schumann Solo Piano Literature}, 11-12.
\textsuperscript{67} Joan Chissell, \textit{Schumann Piano Music}, 11.
[Vult] Took his flute and went, blowing it, out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house and down the road. Walt heard with delight the vanishing tones speaking to him; for he never dreamed that his brother was vanishing with them.68

Vult’s slow disappearance is felt until all we hear is a measure of silence marking his complete departure, followed by a brief codetta.69

Example 8. *Papillons*, No. 12, Measures 25-48.70

In the final measures, the sustained dominant seventh chord is slowly “peeled” away one note at a time from the bass to the treble until only the solitary root note is left.71 This “dying-away” effect (example 9) was not exclusive to just *Papillons*, as Schumann first introduced it in his *Abegg Variations*, Op. 1 and even made an exercise

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out of it in his preface to Op. 3, *Studies after Capricci by Paganini*.72 There is no definitive interpretation of Schumann’s music (or that of any composer), especially since he was reluctant to admit the presence of programs in his music.73 No one will ever know for certain, and that is the beauty of the music.

Example 9. *Papillons*, No. 12, Measures 89-92.74

Awareness of the literary connections to *Papillons* can inspire students to perform these pieces with a better understanding of their individual character. The student can formulate a complete story in his/her mind and use the descriptive traits of the three characters throughout their playing. The student might indicate in his/her music exactly which character is being portrayed in any given phrase.

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72 Ibid., 11.
As a set, the *Papillons* – though contrasting in many ways from piece to piece, phrase to phrase, and even measure to measure – still have similar technical issues recurring throughout the work as a whole. There are six specific and prominent problems a student may face when learning this piece. For each of these challenges, examples will be given from throughout Schumann’s late elementary and all levels of intermediate repertoire that have similar difficulties. These examples come from *Scenes from Childhood*, Op. 15; *Album for the Young*, Op. 68; *Sketches for Album for the Young*, Op. 68; *Forest Scenes*, Op. 82; and *Album Leaves*, Op. 124. The lists are in no way exhaustive.

The first difficulty in *Papillons*, obvious from the start, is that of octaves. They appear as a challenge through their recurring use in multiple pieces in a row (requiring endurance), and continuous repetitions such as in measures 1-15 of No. 4. Intermediate-level pieces begin to incorporate wide hand stretches and legato octaves; excessive use of octaves, however, moves a student into more advanced repertoire such as *Papillons*. In preparing for significant octave playing, one might consider looking at

- Op. 15, No. 5 *Perfect Happiness*
- Op. 15, No. 6 *A Great Event*
- Op. 15, No. 8 *At the Fireside*
- Op. 15, No. 10 *Almost too Serious* (large leaps - more than an octave)
- Op. 68, No. 17 *Little Morning Wanderer*
- Op. 68, No. 23 *Rider Piece*
Op. 68, No. 25 *Reminiscences of the Theater*
Op. 68, No. 29 *The Strange*
Op. 68, No. 31 *War Song*
Op. 68, No. 36 *Italian Mariner’s Song* (Broken octaves)
Op. 68, No. 41 *Northern Song*
Op. 68, No. 42 *Figured Chorale*
Op. 68, No. 43 *New Year’s Eve Song*
Op. 82, No. 8 *Hunting Song*
Op. 124, No. 3 *Scherzino*

The second challenge is the ability to make sudden shifts in key, tempo, character, and dynamics. These intense changes can be more challenging than one might expect and require slow, repetitious, and most importantly, *deliberate* practice. Some good pieces in the intermediate repertoire that require various sudden changes include

Op. 15, No. 11 *Frightening*
Op. 68, No. 6 *Poor Orphan Child*
Op. 68, No. 9 *Little Folk Song*
Op. 68, No. 19 *Little Romance*
Op. 68, No. 36 *Italian Mariner’s Song*
Op. 82, No. 2 *Hunter on the Watch*
Op. 82, No. 6 *Roadside Inn*

Third is the ability to formulate long flowing phrases with a firm sense of direction – a fundamental skill that is rooted first in the ability of a student to be able to develop an inner sense of pulse and grouping. Many students as early as the middle elementary level of study should be learning to develop this inner sense of pulse grouping.\(^{75}\) From there, students can develop longer phrases from two measures, to four measures, growing into many of the eight-measure phrases seen throughout *Papillons.*

Pieces to consider when developing a sense of phrasing include

Op. 15, No. 1 *From Foreign Countries and People*
Op. 15, No. 7 *Reverie*
Op. 15, No. 10 *Almost Too Serious*

\(^{75}\) Max Camp, *Teaching Piano: The Synthesis of Mind, Ear and Body,* 76.
Fourth, clear voicing is a must, especially with many of the movements requiring voicing in the upper register and often on top of full, weighty chords. In a few difficult pieces, such as No. 9, the inner voice carries the melody so quickly that the performer must listen carefully or the chance to hear it will be lost. The difficulty of having multiple voices in the same hand can be found in

Op. 15, No. 2 Funny Story
Op. 15, No. 4 Suppliant Child
Op. 15, No. 5 Perfect Happiness
Op. 15, No. 6 Important Event
Op. 15, No. 7 Reverie
Op. 15, No. 8 At the Fireside
Op. 15, No. 9 The Knight of the Hobby-Horse
Op. 15, No. 11 Frightening
Op. 15, No. 13 The Poet Speaks
Op. 68, No. 4 A Hymn
Op. 68, No. 15 Spring Song
Op. 68, No. 17 Little Morning Wanderer
Op. 68, No. 19 Little Romance
Op. 68, No. 20 Rustic Song
Op. 68, No. 21 **
Op. 68, No. 26 ***
Op. 68, No. 27 Little Canonic Song
Op. 68, No. 28 Remembrance (November 4, 1847)
Op. 68, No. 29 The Stranger
Op. 68, No. 31 War Song
Op. 68, No. 32 Scheherazade
Op. 68, No. 42 Figured Chorale
Fifth, is the ability to maintain supple wrists and firm fingers to execute passages with quick, large leaps, and quickly moving staccatos. Preparatory pieces with passages such as these include:

Op. 15, No. 3 *Catch Me*  
Op. 15, No. 11 *Frightening*  
Op. 68, No. 7 *Hunting Song*  
Op. 68, No. 33 *Gathering of the Grapes*  
Op. 68, No. 36 *Italian Mariner’s Song*  
Op. 68, No. 40 *Little Fugue*  
Op. 82, No. 2 *Hunter on the Watch*  
Op. 82, No. 8 *Hunting Song*  
Op. 82, No. 9 *Departure*  
Op. 124, No. 4 *Waltz*

The final technical challenge is that of syncopations, unusual accents and sforzandos, such as in No. 10. For this, teachers might consider looking at:

Op. 15, No. 3 *Catch Me If You Can*  
Op. 15, No. 8 *By the Fireside*  
Op. 15, No. 9 *The Knight of the Hobby-Horse*  
Op. 15, No. 11 *Frightening*  
Op. 15, No. 12 *Child Falling Asleep*  
Op. 68, No. 15 *Spring Song*
CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, this list is certainly not exhaustive and has been restricted to pieces by Robert Schumann. Many of these pieces are staples for intermediate-level piano students all over the world, and are great teaching tools – not only for preparation to play more advanced Schumann works – but simply for being better musicians and performers in general. Character pieces help students experience feelings and states of mind. They are “the interpretation and expression of the effect of reality on the human mind and soul”. The list of nineteenth and twentieth century character pieces is vast. Pieces such as Stephen Heller’s Prelude in E minor, Op. 81 No. 4, Bedrich Smetna’s Unschuld (Innocence), and César Frank’s Prayer would also be wonderful pieces for an intermediate student to study in preparation for performing more advanced character pieces.

Though well-respected today, the music of Robert Schumann was not widely accepted in his time. Audiences of the middle nineteenth century were not used to his programmatic pieces, rhythmic dissonances, circular concepts, or quirky changes in mood and juxtapositions of character. Those characteristics, however, are exactly what made him the aesthetic genius for which he is appreciated today. The character piece was

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77 Ibid., 3.
a genre worthy of Schumann as much as Schumann was worthy of composing the genre. His output of these types of pieces has left the world many brilliant works, including *Papillons*, Op. 2, that have the potential to be a great teaching tool in any piano studio.
Bibliography


